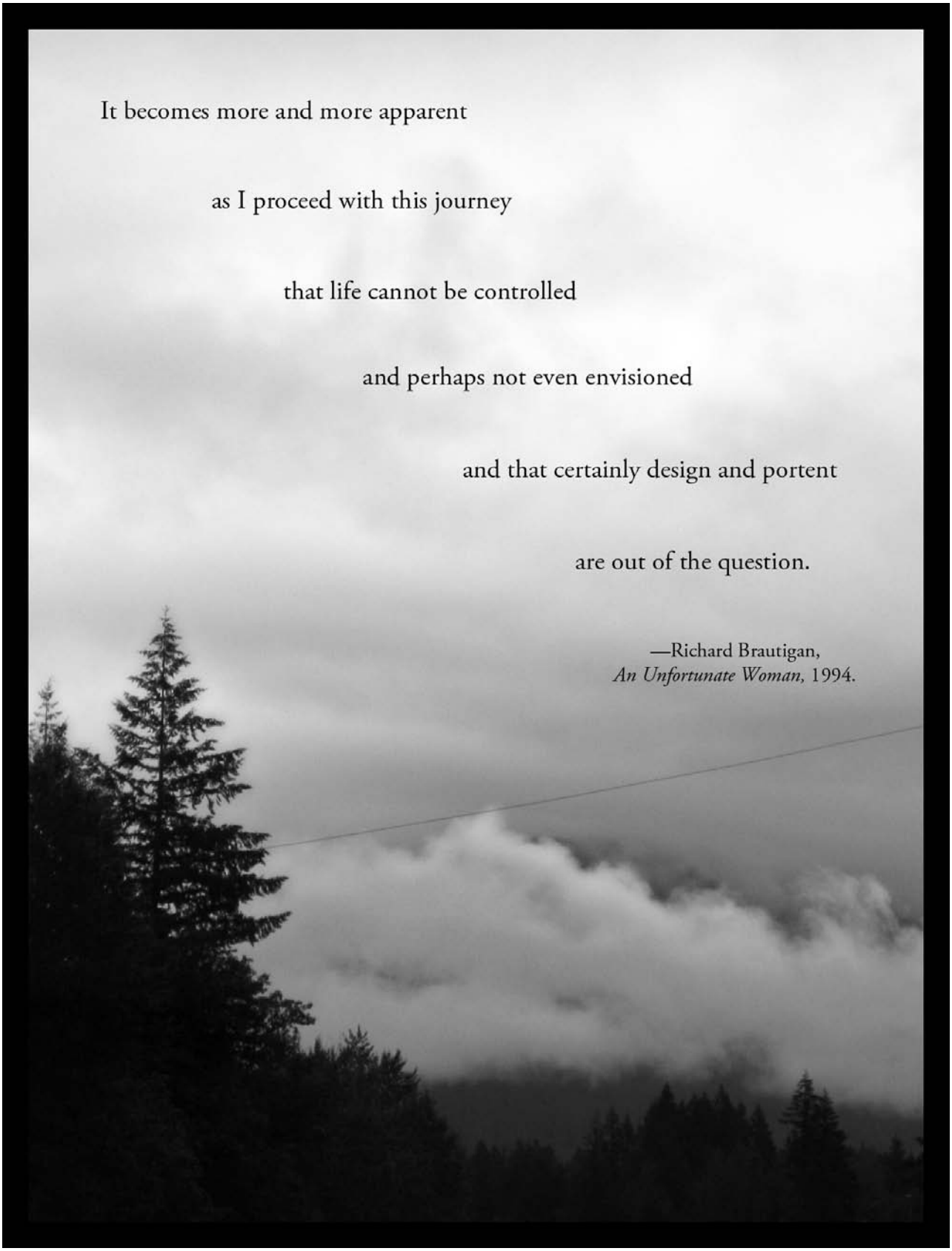
The Cenacle

Number 70 ✦ October 2009


It becomes more and more apparent
as I proceed with this journey
that life cannot be controlled
and perhaps not even envisioned
and that certainly design and portent
are out of the question.
—Richard Brautigan,
An Unfortunate Woman, 1994.

Letter to President Barack Obama

October 10, 2009
10:10 p.m.
CoffeeTime—my armchair
Portland, Oregon

Dear President Obama,

This is my third letter to you, but first since you've been President of these United States. I wrote to you in June 2008 while you were a U.S. Senator from Illinois, campaigning for president—& again last December when you had won the office but not yet been sworn in. So in both instances, I was anticipating, rather than considering, your work as president. I say this as prelude to this letter which does this considering.

First of all, let me congratulate you on being awarded the 2009 Nobel Peace Prize. I would say I was surprised without being shocked. It is becoming clearer to me that the world outside the U.S. treasures you in a way Americans, many, do not. Your being about as far way from George W. Bush as imaginably possible alone is enough to give you great honors. Americans, on the other hand, evaluate you too minutely to step back for the larger view. Some fear you will do too much; more fear you will do not enough.

I find myself drawn to sports team analogies when thinking about your style of governance. You clearly recognize two things: you were not made king, & your time in the office is definably finite. Eight years at most. You know the twined political & corporate & media bureaucracies of Washington, D.C. & the nation as a whole predated your election, & will continue should you govern the nation every day from January 20, 2009 to January 20, 2017. It's how it is. So the clock is ticking, but it's early. Time enough to try some things, start accruing points & momentum. Of course, arriving to a playing field bloody & gouged as George W. Bush left it throws a kind of desperate spin on the game right off. So, to advance the sports metaphor, & maybe begin to leave it too, we're in a playoff series, best-of-seven, once heavily favored, but down three games to one.

Time to panic? No. Not your style. Time to game plan. Call out weaknesses, clarify priorities, figure strategies.

You made promises; now every hand is out. Your opponents are going to crowd the line, play dirty, do whatever. There are always fat cat motherfuckers who are doing nicely, slurping up their share of blood-profits in the soft shadows of quasi-legality. Don't like a diminished amount of slurp.

Call out weaknesses. The country is mostly broke, angry, sick of war, despising Republicans & none too kinning up to Democrats in truth. You're fresh blood, an orator, a visionary. Cool & wicked intelligent.

Clarify priorities. Easy. You call out the broken healthcare system as crippling the nation's economy, & a moral abomination. This focuses the media chatter & is, while a risky issue to tackle first, one whose tricky navigation to success will keep the bar set high, & rack

up the points.

What will come after? No doubts here: civil rights legislation. Gay rights. Drug policy revision. Stem cell research. Environmental policy. All important, all wait, but their successes hinge on healthcare. That first big score.

Overseas, the path is oddly clearer. American presidents do more as they will, & can, on the world stage. So: talks with Iran, North Korea, Russia. Talks with Israel & Palestine. Renewal of commitment to diplomacy & the United Nations. I believe you will do a lot more in time, that you've had to deal with the great wounded beast this nation is foremost, & you are & you will.

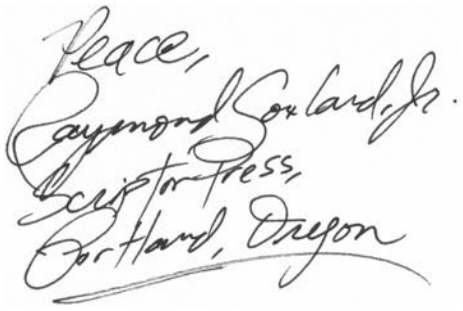
Iraq? We'll be out in 2012. Afghanistan? You will be stuck with that one for a while because withdrawal is not so simple. But I would estimate that you have no taste for perpetual war & occupation. Nor will you abandon a nation in suffering, in part by the U.S.'s doing. My guess is the answers will come slowly, like with healthcare domestically.

You've been in office about ten months. Ten out of a possible 96. What I've seen in that time is a man settling into his job while having to perform it at the highest level. You are not a miracle worker yet you have changed a great deal already. Nobody was talking about serious healthcare reform a year ago, as though it would happen any time soon. Diplomatic talks with Iran were inconceivable. A siege mentality had consumed the world, a constant wondering where the lunatic monster head in D.C. would lurchily turn its rabid, blurry red-eyed gaze next. What was left for Bush to fuck up?

He leaves office, you arrive, a society with little patience waits about five minutes before complaining. The heart of what I want to say to you right now is this: you will never bear the power or influence again that you are accumulating now & will have for the next two years or so. Don't save it. Power does not keep. The fire you're raising now, the allies you are making, the strategies for working with Congress, handling the media, & so on, it is a conjuration that will go so far, & eventually spend out. Power & fire are both like that.

For awhile you will have to play with practically breathless perfection, & hope or pray the Universe or some equal potency is mostly on your side. So I say this: play it through. Hesitate less often until not at all. There's a moment in playing the great games—in making the great works of Art—in conceiving the greatest thoughts of science & philosophy & learning—a moment when impediments fall aside & the way opens clear. You are nearing that point, Mister President, Barrack, where trust is all, action is all, you will no longer make the moves, the *moves will make you*.

That's what I see now & foresee for you as forthcoming. A lot of work, a lot of wrangling. Just remember, my friend, it's not that your best fire won't spend out, it's how well you wield it while in your hands. Play it artless, play it humble, play it like you can't lose.



The Cenacle

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Thank you to President Obama and those in Congress and the American media willing to stand up to corporate jackal motherfuckers blooding the land of its soul and capital . . . thanks to Catfishrivers and AbandonView for working with us on both radio and print projects, what fun! Thank you to KT for being a genuinely decent guy in an airless cage of paper green . . . and Nemo & Emma, our thoughts are with you in your time of hurt & eventual healing . . . a wish for new peace & fresh path for each of you . . .

Raymond Soulard, Jr.

Labyrinthine

[a new fixtion]

"Sorrow drifts into your heart
through a pinhole
Just like a faucet that leaks,
& there is comfort in the sound
But while you debate half-empty
& half-full, it slowly rises
Your love is going to drown"
—Death Cab for Cutie,
"Marching Bands of Manhattan," 2005.

None other but sing true, call it deep vow, brutal hand up the sky, to the endless night, call it hard flutter from what slow breathes within, call it the remaining clod from a thousand stellar & fool hours, still dangling close, still a grasp to the wheel, still a fang in new dreams, hours of trilling grace, hours shattering deeper within minute by minute, foul silences of waiting, fouler still when the words come out to preserve one heart or torso at the shedding of another—

None other but sing true as the steerage gives way, sweetness falls now distant, the breathless hover of youth but another plan of raw memory by plank of ruined wish by plank of what hungers flatten the wall & which blood to rule, & a blight of bruises kept close in a bag none other may touch or know, none may touch or know me, none may touch or know, this what becomes in the awful place to sing truer, oh, crank it, climb it, crawl farther in, is any safe safe enough?

None other but sing true, down streets of neon trash, crowds around a quart & a bark of glaring newsprint, this quarreling hour won't come again, sing true, wail when the note eludes, cry, croak, when a mug of heat shivers up every morning hand & dulls black every nocturnal one, when all of it seems little & less, true, sing, cry, croak true, to a why clustered in world's daily spiral of spasm & shit—

True, sing true, the shined face warped below passes with its slaven pride & woe, tell you nothing for a kiss, tell you something for a dime, tell you everything if you make it good, down in the molten fall, make it good down there, tell you all, with a streak of grunts & an arc through inner skies without staying visitor, ever—

Sing true, says the book while a skinny yip of pages, deep vow to the endless night, brutal hand to a sky harder still, sing true, yes, I will shake & flake, a clumsy bullet in its chute, this is how, how's why, why's truth, truth a bush & its fruit flaming & poison to everything known, true, sing—

Whatever it leads, sing true, nights barking empty to skies tinned with brights, sing it with both hands, all three, what releases when so much for the bin, hard want of shake & flake, teaching skin to shine without sun, lean to wet burble but come only a few words, the inner scratch wished is knowing not by name alone—

What's to come but seed of years harm & heal, only lesson is yearn's, only path is humble's, only truth is Art's, & there are two ways of touch, choice is a slide, ranges with will—

Breathe. Again. The first turn left or right & none turn back. The first note a cry, a croak, a wet noise, a challenge to all listening, & to every note to come—

True. Sing true. Left or right.

ii.

Midnight when the quiet parts & the way splits out to light, & a puff of an answer, wispy drift on distant treetops, the air is cool steel, the light bounces & a few scattered inches reply, come to me, path, I am hardly more than just another who wakes & does not know, is this waking? Hardly more than who loves & does not know, whatever was love? Point to it! Where its flick, where its live hustling tremble? Who wants & does not know, what of it but shit & sweat & semen? What of it but yearn's countless hours, what was it then, more of a hard pull for least relief than two touches warming to one, what was it? Ask enough & kindling up an answer?

I dream this world, it turns by woods & steel, black shaft & white leaves, dream it & do not know, called it hunger for the cleft miles thousands & days years ago, call it dream with remain of faith in shifts, this, that, behold! Or just the night fine without wrinkle, groove ever bootless toward the tune—

A brutal report & wake. Wake or awake? What was it? Who?

Why the word "dis-illusion" on his mind, hyphen & all, & that great bang too, he could not immediately connect the two nor distinguish between them; it was like the bang spoke the word or the word emitted the bang, so what was it then? What had happened in my dreaming?

Had he really died? He looked around, the air muddy with early morning light, silhouettes of his many things unmoved in the night. Seemed like the hours had simply lain nearby & waited his return yet something now not ordinary, *something*, points at angles odd to the light, dis-illusion?

Try to remember now. Not one for black outs yet what else he'd call this isn't clear.

Just one fact recalled would save him, one fact of waking to crack dreaming's membranous hold, all the foolishness about dying would go. *Just one fact.*

His lower back hurts, like often in recent mornings. Tight, stiff, he wasn't sure, a pain that passed with his shower. Not much to worry on, not likely.

What fact then? Focus, Jack! Look, there's your fact maybe, see that neon sign outside? Couple of hours & it lights up, S & G Pizza. There! OK. Simon & Garfunkel Pizza, someone called it. Some wiseass. Who?

Dunno, but something, a knuckle of a fact if not the whole finger. S & G Pizza. Good

ol' S & G Pizza made of clay & rubber cement. Cheap though. A dollar a lousy slice. Five bucks for the whole shitty pie. Come baseball season they grow a line out the door. Monday nights free slices from 11 to midnight.

S & G. What the *fuck* am I doing back here? How long ago I lived in this shitpile?

He squirms violently on his bed. Can't get up, can't go back, needs a better clue but scared, really scared now.

What was that bang?

(The way is called dis-illusion, molten new press to go.)

iii.

It was a lousy time in my life, I admit that now. I would have then but I don't think people work like that, don't want to. We keep up the shitty job, the shitty relationship, the loser friends. This place was the central station of all that.

I'm not sure when it started going like it did. But there I was, dealing, & then I was doing some myself.

Little things. Fucked my girl's best friend. Stupid reason. She wouldn't do coke with me & fuck all night anymore like we did, like we did the first night we met & lots of nights after that. Something happened & she wasn't into partying anymore. She liked me enough to go with me but she was looking around. Not at men, I could've handled that. She wanted out. I think she wanted to take me too.

So naturally I fucked her friend, fucked her on our bed, fucked her when only more luck than I had would have kept it secret.

She left. There & then. Packed & walked out, not a word.

So now I'm stuck with this friend who's really fucked up. Likes it hard, OK, lots of women do. Likes it really hard, OK I can handle it. Wants several guys at once, whoa. Coke head Gangbang over the S & G? No.

I kicked her out but we kept fucking at her friend's house about twice a week. See the run of this? The cosmos brings me back here of all the places I've stopped?

Was there anything else, anything good?

The toothbrush? Fuck. I don't know.

He doesn't have to move his seat to remember. Unlike a lot of others in that crowd, he kept his hygiene. Kept it like a church when all else is burning, you might say.

And why? Those months he stayed with his granpa in the country. Made him brush morning & bedtime. Wash his face. Floss. Fucking floss!

But see his bathroom door had a lock. The one over the S & G that is. So the party kept out while he took care of these ablutions.

A yellow toothbrush. A tube of toothpaste. They talked.

Yah. See? But that's how it was. Middle of his coke-fueled years, no sign of God or saints in any of it & he's listening to them talk every morning.

The new girl, his old girl's best friend, had got him a new toothbrush & a tube of paste.

"The old ones are ratty. I figured you'd thank me."

"Did I ask?"

"Sorry! Shit."

"You're not moving in."

"How does getting you a toothbrush & paste equal that?"

"It does. And you're not."

It went on like that. It didn't matter then & none now.

But they talked. He kept using his old brush & old tube though it was running low.

"I'll be done soon."

"Don't worry he'll use you to the end."

"It's OK. I've served my purpose. I'm ready to move on."

He tried to use as little each day as possible.

"We all move on. That's how it works. I've got a few ideas on the matter."

"Like what?"

"Well, OK. The physical part of me, this tube, it will end up in some landfill. Break down, feed the worms, as they say."

"Is there more?"

"Sure thing! Some part of me affected the world, I think that stays. A stain. A scar."

"Is there any more?"

"Yah, at least to my idea. The rest moves along, it's not bound to this world. I think it just goes somewhere else."

"Heaven?"

"I don't know. It's just an idea."

I listened to this, whatever it was, they talked about lots of things, & then the tube was really empty & didn't talk anymore & I threw it away & I wish I had some choice in it all because I would have thrown away everything & everybody else in my life to keep that toothpaste talking to my brush. My granpa promised me brushing would serve me well for all my life. "You only get one set!" he'd say serious & smiling both.

Why am I back here?

iv.

When then, I don't know, was the shot a gun to my head, am I dead? Is this hell? Sure, that works. Life over I get sent to the S & G Pizza in the sky to wait for what happens next. Shitty pizza, lots of it, I bet it's free up here.

And I bet if any nookie it's 'Stina who shows up, probably with an ostrich egg full of coke & the Celtics' back court to party. And I get to choose: watch or take my sloppy skanky round!

No, this isn't working. Whatever this really is, he wants out. No cameras seem to be watching him but why would they need them? Angels, aliens, transdimensional bug-beings from the tri-moon Arse-World? Nah.

He gets off the bed, seems to have a body, seems to work in the usual way. It's still not dawn, if they have dawn around here, but enough to look outside a ways & see how far this delusion reaches—

A bridge. The S & G sign is lodged in a bridge . . . of glass? Alright. Stretches out

endlessly, alright.

So then, Jack, is that how they brought you here or how you leave or both? It an exit or a test. Come on, man! You've read books when you weren't fucking whatever wiggled twice your way!

How to know? Dead, dream, sweet reveal of yon hereafter? He looks back at his room. Remembers the last time he fucked 'Stina there, he'd taken to pushing the bed to the side so he could fuck her slowly on the floor. Make her beg. Wouldn't let her come. His fury twisting into a muscle enveloping his body, a rhythmic rage, then she spoke

"Don't you love anything?"

"Wha—?"

She jerked around til he pulled out & let her up. Her so-light blue eyes muddy with fuck & powder but straight at him now.

"Don't you love anything?"

He stares, lifts off her, lets that freaky fine fucking ass of hers loose, says nothing.

"Come on! It's not me. I know that. But what? Who? Do you believe in anything?"

For a moment something held between them. A clarity, a wordless, lilting, beautiful hover. For a moment none of this was ruin & revenge. She was a pretty girl, worth a soft, shaping hand upon her, a sugar-filled heart given, timeless even beyond youth's ever-arcing raw yearn, the moment birthing its impossible lengthening stretch.

She sat up in a crouch. "You know what I believe in? What I love? God. You think cuz you bang my ass you got all of me? You don't even get that last bit when I come, or when you won't let me. God gets it. Always has. Always will." Finds her pack of Marlboros, snaps one into place.

He threw her out that night. They kept fucking but there was no more talking & he enjoyed it less. Gentler, harder, it did no good. God got the last bit. Always had. Always would.

It's a bridge, alright, & looks like glass, but it has no rails. Just a walkway to forever who knows how high above, what? The dirty sidewalk with its stuck gum & butts & crusts like the real S & G? Nothing?

I could try that door there, see if I can just use the stairs to leave. Those wooden steps with the dead bulb? The dead wires, really, since he tried putting in a new bulb himself one time & the switch still didn't work.

He walks to the door, & tries the knob. It opens, & there's the hallway & there's the stairs.

A choice then. Nobody stopping me. Why do I think which way I choose will bring me deeper in or pop me back out? And either way no going back?

v.

So wanting to call the good natural & the bad aberration, hold up, stumble, those words are crackling with ambiguity, wild glints from the building's lower-floor windows but not near its basement nor

its root—

Wanting to believe the open hand sweeter true than the fist, wanting, if not single holy explain at least a cluster of bright lights tossing worlds out & receiving creatures home—

Wanting to nod that beauty fills the pocked world & overflow, & more coming & whether a stream or a dangerous hard burst, a sad cry may be heard over the years & miles, rescue is one chance more than none for every existing bit of the cosmos—

A dawny hour & dream raises the perplex of countless diasporas at demise—what's buried, what lingers in memory & deed, what travels back, along, elsewhere—ah sugar!

But, raven-eyed clarity argues later, no, what is, is, nothing to join, nothing to resist, flesh torn by bullet & tree by hack, the quietest laugh of two in an alley's thin cover, great young kings slaughtered with wine & generosity fading on their faces, old crowned hacks with truncheons for hearts & deathlust for principle—

So tell me which if not several or none—tell me, how it assembles toward great song

She stops reading & looks around, startled to be here. A beat, & *very startled*. One least glance down at her outfit & slight touch of her hair—

but it's the scent from her neck, *that scent*, she'd not worn it or smelled it since she was here

the red tinge.

A Love Supreme.

vi.

A preacher, easiest way to describe him. Yet what church, which holy book? Were we followers or stalkers? It was more than months, it was years but not all at once, not til near the end.

The end was here. He was going away, for good, she knew it, she came here intent to go with him. She was crazy with . . . something. Love? Lust? She knew both well enough, even that young, girls learn quickly to discern & distinguish or it goes bad, sometimes quickly.

Maybe love. He wasn't so old & she admired him. If he had commanded or requested or hinted her to his bed she would have come, & probably several times again.

Ha. It still hurts. She'd waited here, for hours. She'd dressed & re-dressed herself for hours. Brought nothing, not a change of clothes, not a credit card. Herself, primped but plain. Her request was simple: will you take me or deny me?

What the fuck am I doing back here? Is it going to play out like that again? Am I dead? Am I dreaming?

Nothing much til the drinks start arriving. The men in the club sniff her, sniff the sex untucked in her outfit & perfume.

She tells the barman, an older gent who does not speak to her breasts, that she is waiting for someone & wishes no drink offers. He nods, kindly, firmly, no more drinks distract her.

His only doctrine seemed to be: "Praise." Someone asked: "Praise what?" & guessed God. He let them. That is, he did not deny or dispute.

She didn't think it was a two-word commandment, or even one word. She didn't think it was a commandment at all, advice, caution, or any else. She thought it was simply what he did, not even a vow. He said "Praise" as though he had said "Breathe." He breathed, he praised. For that matter, he shat, he praised. He was sullen, he praised, he was ecstatic, he praised. He was praise & even this was putting it too complexly.

So do I leave? I stayed much longer last time. Long after I gave up. I had nothing else. By when I realized that what I needed exactly was to fuck blind & mewling one of those drink-bearers they were gone. The bartender watched me but kindly; I could have talked to him though he wouldn't have fucked me. I was too pathetic.

What would I have said? "He's gone. My path is gone. I came here to beg him, maybe I would have followed him & killed him if he had said no. I was the last of them. I thought I had won, outlasted the rest. No. I'd simply *lost last*."

The bartender, have locked the door, closing time, came over & offered me the couch in the back room. He knew I was sober but in a way worse for it.

I declined, I was almost rude. I left quickly, took a cab home, with money I could not afford to spend to a place no more home than an alley, maybe worse.

Worse. Lord it got worse.

Now here. There was a . . . noise. A shot, a baseball bat? Am I in that alley, mugged & mauled? Returning in my bleeding coma to where I last had hope?

I'm not leaving. Whatever the fuck this is, I'm here again & leaving didn't help.

So I wait, watch the bartender a little closer than last time. He's old-fashioned, his pepper-grey hair close-cut & neatly combed. His spectacles, gold wired. His apron is more colorful than I would've guessed. Looks like a Jackson Pollock painting, wild splatters. A gift. He's loved.

I love him a little. He's the last one to see me with hope, watch it leave me.

He reads the paper, the sports section. Plays the radio softly, probably so not to bother me. I noticed none of this the last time. I waited blindly.

He locks the door, shuts out most of the lights.

"Miss, I don't like to be forward but I am going home now. You look a bit lost. There's a couch in back, with some pillows & blankets. You could sleep & I'll let you out in the morning."

She makes herself nod, it hurts amazingly but she does, just enough.

He starts but then nods too. "It's the old manager's office. Rebecca, that is the owner, doesn't use it much. Right back there."

She nods again, no pain this time.

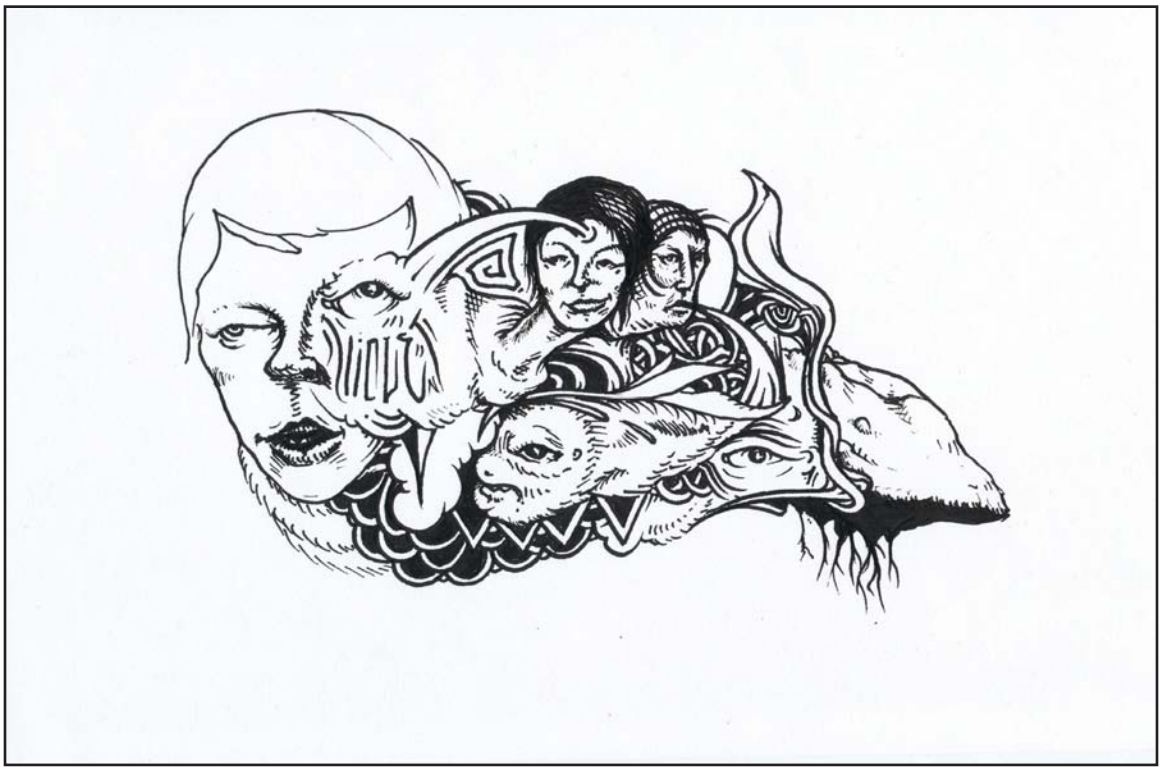
He smiles, stands uncertain a moment. "Well. I'll leave you then. I'll be in at 8. You won't be bothered. There's a refrigerator with food."

"Why me?"

He stares.

"How do you know I won't rob the place or burn it to the ground?"

He takes her questions seriously but is undisturbed. "I don't, for certain. But I'm pretty



AbandonView

sure you came here to meet not just anyone tonight, & that person didn't come. Maybe you have a bed somewhere but you can't face it yet. I know about that. I've had a few nights like that." He nods. Smiles again. A smile gravelly with kindness & years. Leaves her be. She hears the door lock from outside.

vii.

Dream of a deep, waking groove, what sleeping fingers gesture to, the body's lost night hours buried in dream, deep, waking groove, slicker want than sugar & girl-come, within a great tree's thousand flicker, I ask nakedly here but of what, of whom, I don't know, all truth in deep, waking groove, bears the words, bears them lightly, seriously, enough like they matter, enough like maybe not—

A next & a new & maybe no, or a yawn, or the ideas are thin & futile, or they don't strike, don't even tap, & yet here I am holding this notebook like a guitar, like my one true lover, my pen all that carries me between thens, among hours stupid & peerless—

And I don't know truly don't fucking know & I want to, I want to know some of it matters or comes to good—

Shit. What is this book? Where am I? Oh. He left. I didn't know what to do. So I read. Still secretly twelve years old, braces & no breasts, no confidence, reading. I know why I read this shit. He believes the way I did, the way he did? I don't know

Anyway, stand up & deal. Couch, right? For one, miss? Yes, sir. I will be dining & dreaming alone tonight. Very good, miss. This way.

Or . . . that way?

She notices the hallway past the manager's office, past the couch its old blanket & pillow, elsewhere, seems like a pretty long hallway for a small club. Where to?

Am I allowed to sleuth in the afterlife, or coma, or whatever?

Should I go? Would anyone care?

viii.

The floor's always cold, oh I remember that well. I felt it even on my cot, even when I traded for a second blanket. A floor of ice, that's what I called it, & it should have been low on my worries list, but it wasn't. I was like that back then; I wasn't trying to be different or a character or a nut. That's just how it was. I took the pills everyone tried to tongue & spit. I sat in group & listened & always had enough to say when it was my turn.

But the floor of ice was my worry & I didn't tell anyone about it. I figured I was onto something so the rest of my life was an act. A good one. Nobody knew squat.

Well my doctor wondered. He'd ask me why I thought I was in the hospital.

"I'm a danger to myself & others?"

"Try harder."

"I have to rehabilitate enough to rejoin society as a useful member?"

"Come on."

I'd smile, he'd chuckle & we'd call it a stalemate. He was a nice guy, wife & kids.
"What was the last thing you remember before coming here?"
"I fell apart. I didn't see it coming but it happened. Wham."
"Wham?"
"Yah, wham."
"Tell me about it."
"I don't remember it too well."
He looked at me annoyed.
"I don't! There's a gap, a chasm, & I see it but I don't see what's in it or how I made it."
He nods. Somewhat satisfied.

OK then here I am again. The flood is goddamned cold as ever. But this time there's not even a chasm.

There's a wham though. A wham! really.

I try to stand & find I'm still old but maybe not so old. I try the door & it's not locked. Quickly I sit back on my bed. None of this is right.

I got out of here! They let me go. It was a long & hard time but I waited them out.
"We can't hold you any longer. I wish you & I had made more progress though."
"You did fine. I like you."
"That doesn't matter. What matters is that I won't be where you go to help you."

Hey, there's a TV! Shit. It don't have cable, & it's black & white, but I didn't have one in my room last time. Someone always hogged it in the common room. I had a radio, a pink one shaped like a cat but I don't see it here.

The TV is showing the news. Looks like a war. Another one? I ain't never shot nobody & I'm in here? Is that the President? Looks like the other one. I stopped keeping track. I'm sure he doesn't notice me either.

Am I back then? What happened this time?

What I remember is changing the damned lightbulb. That & that damned movie. I began to wonder if they happened the same night, the same decade. I wondered if so much could have happened in one night & suddenly my life was gone.

So yah I lied to the doctor. He had no clue what I saw, what any of that was like. He couldn't help anyway.

The day they released me I almost lost it, almost cracked so I could stay. Very close. I had no old life to return to.

I just wanted to see that movie again. I think I did. I think I did & I think that's why I'm here again. It put me here.

ix.

His arc began young, rode its bolt still, shakier but still, or maybe he wandered a series of them, an oscillation of reveal & obscure, how to tell, why, life sequential but more disorderly for this, there had probably been many light bulbs, many movies, surely yes, & how many empty wallet nights happy on a lone drunk & how many quivering some pair of clawing hips, & how many times his ideas seemed run out, & how many times a bloody burst of new ones, & how many doctors with their same questions & how many times did he say fuck you embedded in a softly spake lie?

His only disbelief was in nothing, this jacketed his heart in times none other would or wished to—

I disbelieve in nothing.

What then?

Not the high smacking prize of fleshly commune. Not the quiet break in a man's ego where a hustle called God may step in. Not the truth of books still safely bedded in great evening oaks. Not the neural conjure sparking bluest from dreams. Not Yogi the Bear nor Arthur the fucking grail.

What then?

I disbelieve in nothing.

x.

Hadn't told a lover that in a long time though I used to all the time it sounded nice though I had a buddy some years ago said to me every time we'd hit our fourth tavern of the night or fifth if he was cheerful or distracted "pussy loves power" & sometimes in an Australian accent "pussy loves power, matey" we drank together a whole gulp of years back then but the last time I said it was the girl with freckles & no tattoos I remember how pleased I was when her clothes came off & not an inch awled with ink I must have licked that young skin an hour more like three & its perfection she was so out of her universe in my bed & I'd stopped going slow it was tiring to train one & the next & within an hour of her giggling arrival in my bedroom she was on her flawless flat tummy hands so handcuffed one to each bedpost as I slowly shaved her already trimmed cunt to a gleaming bareness & she shouted & cried each time I accelerated my cock fardeep her tight cunt & I had to make her cum it was my world's vow in that lost hour she did & fainted it was so hard eventually she came to & wanted more in a whisper til I refused smiling & she clawed me several good ones til I let her have it again she never quite put on the freckled farmgirl mask again & I let her go when I realized her bitchscent wasn't wanting a master cock but new raw shipment every time she even did me the grace of crying that last time & as I fucked her, hands bound & hung from a ceiling hook, leather, chains, branding, not enough but my gift I whispered to her over & over again I disbelieve in nothing I disbelieve in nothing I disbelieve in nothing & there were years much later when I missed her freckles when I missed the thin layer I'd taken from her that first night & over & again until it did not return & she couldn't remember & it didn't matter but I knew & I had another buddy but we didn't booze we smoked excellent hashish from his hookah while he spun Grateful Dead bootleg cassettes on his stereo & we talked philosophically til dawn it was dear those nights with him & I wanted to say it to him too but I no longer bore this view deep

enough in me I'd felt the cracks come on me least blips I would ignore & then whole yards of wall torn away & I said nothing to anybody & then another life a calmer merer one but still some pleasures until the night I had to change a light bulb wanted to willed to & the movie & then it was over, really over, I came here in a car or an ambulance or a hearse & it was over, & then I left & it was over again & then & then & then & then & here & then & here & then & freckles & nothing I disbelieve in nothing & it was ancient but I chased oh hell's world behold my yearn I chased—the floor is cold here like always I disbelieve in nothing.

xi.

When the bird comes, I know it's time to decide, I'm not here to wait this time, the bird is mythic in size & replaces my thoughts of the door, what of any door when a great golden bird arrives?

Something tugs at me still, I don't know what, something wishes me delay, what's different this time, what does anything mean but here a chance to go?

It was my friend with the hookah, he'd puff & say, "watch out for those real silences, the crazy ones that won't quit. Breathe a couple of times to check but you might have something."

"What then?"

He'd puff, every fucking time, & think like he didn't know. Then he'd say: "If the universe is saying wait by its silence, then wait. Listen. Look around. But wait."

"Wait for what?"

"It will happen. One thing, another, it will happen."

So maybe it's just hashish remembrance that stays me from the bird's back, but for a moment I wait.

xii.

I could live your unsated muse for years & you'd not heed. What doesn't arch with my back, what secrets don't my moans tell? How am I not yours & not anybody else's, not even yet my own? There are things I already know, came to you knowing but maybe I needed more salve than commiseration awhile, needed to be held, wanted a little bluntly, I let you find what you wished in my eyes, let some dark hours unravel, let how much I know waver & wisp as you spoke me back, your simple recall—

When I bled you thought you'd taken something. You were shaken but your manteeth flinched only a moment. First mark on prime cunt . . . still a man! But you missed it then, that moment. It was there. I showed you.

But you shook lightly with pride. I began leaving you then, not tonight. You'll never figure out that subtlety, but there it is, plain with the pound of lingerie I'll leave with you.

You got prime cunt that night. My heart was long gone.

xiii.

You come home in the middle of my packing but you don't see me or my suitcase. You're high from your friend Muddy's liquor stock. "Absinthe doesn't make a person drunk"

you told me. "It makes him sublime!" You go into the bathroom after giving me a brief kiss & a longer grope, leaving the door open, I hear you pee, then the shower & you talk all the while, expecting me to come in & listen, not noticing when I don't, eventually coming out naked with a towel in hand, finishing your story

"—He hit her & only stopped long enough to untangle her from his bicycle rack where she'd gotten tangled. One moment you're changing a flat, the next you're dragged along the road, trapped in bars & straps!"

Wipes his body clean, obsessed with drying completely. Then his hair. Continues talking.

"—Muddy agreed, more or less. He figured if you catch a break like no cops showing up at your door there's no time for sitting around. Dump the car, pack your gear, get the Greyhound to somewhere far. Don't call anyone, just go!"

Finally he looks at me, manages the spot between my chin & chest. This tells me he's horny but not desperate.

"How was class?"

"I didn't go."

Eyes up to my face. "Why not? You're not one to play hooky. Are you OK? Sick?"

I walk over to the bed where my beat blue suitcase is. Covered in Grateful Dead stickers & random others I picked up on my travels. Duct-taped at the hinges.

He looks, & freezes. "What's this?"

"What does it look like, Jamie?"

"You're packing."

"I'm leaving."

"To where?"

"I don't know. Just like I didn't know the day I met you. Now I don't know again."

Silence. This is going to get ugly. He's never hit me at least. I keep packing & wait.

"Why?"

"Everything is God. Everything is shit."

"What does that mean?"

"It means I don't have any other words. I'm going. Yell, mourn, get drunk with Muddy. Another girl will come along."

"That's it?"

I turn & look at him & he pisses me off by going for his dropped towel.

"Nothing else? Not something I did?"

"No, Jamie, something I did. Or didn't do. You were kind to me. But your ideas don't go very deep."

"What does that mean?"

"Nothing. You had fun. But you missed something."

"What?"

I force the snaps shut, pick up my coat & walk to the door. Drop the key on the bureau next to the door.

"Wait!" He doesn't move toward me. I don't wait. I pull open the door & go. Shut it softly because, really, he never hit me & I did need a friend then.

The street is chilly night & here I am, willingly homeless. Left or right.

I pause & imagine Jamie flinging open his window & yelling "You *fucking whore*! You

fucking *cunt*! Take your braindead fucking ass to some other jackass! Cunt!"

No. Not him. Not even close. Not even *close* to close. He's dressing, maybe a little shaky, thinking what he'll tell Muddy.

I can't go back & forward isn't telling me anything. I keep meaning to move but the moment there stretches on & on.

xiv.

Who would know? she thinks back & around, nearer some faces & little close to a few, pushing, eyes closed, sniffing for knowing among her days & miles, & coming reluctantly to what her dreams have been saying often of late—

As a child, she had a friend. Not quite imaginary, like many children. Others had seen this friend & that made it more real, more scary, more fun—

Her friend had left but not without a way back. A word. It had to be spoken aloud, & sincerely. Spoken thusly, her friend would hear & heed & return. The word was simple yet she'd never spoken it since then, taken no chance. This word was her emergency jewel. She'd mouthed it a few times but not spoken it aloud, & sincerely, though her dreams had been urging.

Now? This moment? She knew it would happen, knew this better than she feared it wouldn't, knew it would happen & the chain to then would be re-connected, the world would brighten, she would have to nod to the truth as she'd come to only dimly for awhile.

One word, spoken aloud, & sincerely. Dumb? No.

A garbage truck rolled past, a stinking noisy metal beast, its leering creatures hanging casually from it. One even flapped his tongue at her. Bet you're tight, baby, wanna touch it, little girl? I don't bite, baby, not too hard. You'll like it, all you whorey bitches do. Please? Please? Please?

Maya closes her eyes, breathes deeply in & out several times, opens them, blue of a clear middle range, looks up slightly to a fragment of blank sky, & speaks.

xv.

I wonder if elaboration would help, really, if anything bright worth can be more than vaguely neared—if something intimate leaves its own hour but a breath's linger, if anything at all can be got toward & beheld & called *this good thing stays*—

Follow a moment & its shadow & its effect, what climbed toward it, what fragmented away—

What I know is the beast never sleeps, & suffuses the universe. What I know is how raw the desire past slogans & skirts. What I know is men will not win. Someone said truth is usually sad, I remember this better than most—wishing not—

The hurrying slows, the snarl becomes growl becomes croon—then someone else will raise blades & new songs—

What this *but* elaboration? What this but *good thing staying*?

xvi.

But I remember you all, believe me, for all you didn't see, for the complexities you

thought my open thighs would solve, or salve, those were my times too, what I didn't know, I couldn't give—

& now? What would any of you have? The beast moves along, that's what I know.

Is this me or you or the next one? I spoke my word, with sincerity, what next?

You tell *me*.

Things hold together loosely at best,
the familiar is a passing clot
of sensations—

I don't know, these words aren't
mine, is this what it was
like then?

Maya turn left & head deeper
in sweet it grows be strong—

xvii.

Now what? Suddenly here I am hurrying down this city street, am I being chased? I don't look back but watch the faces I approach, they are blank, turned within, unaware any around them tussling with drama too, that tells me nobody is running toward me, & here comes a street corner & a Don't Walk sign & I decide to risk to know & stop.

No hand snatches at my shoulder, no voice grunts with capture, now I look around & nothing. Yet I was almost running, where the fuck am I, think!

A party. I knew slightly the person who brought me, & he disappeared upon our arrival. At the bar we were at he thought I was gay, said there was a big party he wanted to bring me to, I remember feeling so lonely that it seemed like a good idea, so I went, & it was a stupid idea. I hate parties, especially sex-filled ones, & damn there were naked & half-naked bodies everywhere, an old mansion, unlovely & run down, & did I get a drugged glass of punch? No. I feel clear, nothing fogging my system. I feel good, better than when I was in that bar—

Keep walking, I may be watched as well as chased. Trust that something bad was going on, just don't remember what yet.

What city now the question, a newspaper box will tell me this but I find myself not looking for one, my feet now obeying me, it seems—

Try to add a couple of more pieces, what bar? The one I stayed at for awhile, where they called me Bowie?

No. I had to leave. At first it was perfect then it was a cage, I don't remember how one to the other. Nobody asked anything of me, except I knew my presence was enjoyed, & they believed, or at least enjoyed, my lies. Me a spy? Me a former mushroom? I talked shit like it was gold coin. I made everyone rich.

They weren't dumb. They simply accepted me. I fit in with the freaks & fools. I was funny. They liked my eyes. I don't fucking know.

What was it then? What turned it wrong?

AbandonView

Was there a woman? Think!
He stops, annoyed faces stream around him, & a soft, insistent, hot touch swallows him in memory. Of course. Shit.

"Shit!" he yells & begins to walk faster again, & faster still. "Shit! Shit! Shit!"

Shit.

(shit)

xviii.

She was my age, whatever it was, maybe older, but she tasted much younger. She tasted tight, smooth, whole, I think it was the third time I fucked her I realized what a goddamned beautiful creation I was with. By the fourth I was crumbling. I left after the fifth but came back, & twice more, & somehow there was a back to return to, a long loving back, a voice creamy with eros & agape, a mind, . . . a soul, . . . a *something* that understood me, that empathized, that listened that somethinged & if I had walked left than right that last night & found her again she would have stayed with me.

not that I hit her, I didn't, or cocked around, I didn't, some of my departures weren't actually physical & there was nothing adding up to a fight, the world didn't end in any way save in my worst crevices, & she let it, hoping for return, reunion, more nights til dawn in bed, walking streets, on roofs with sunrises & dusks, at that bar she played at,

fuck. I'm in Seattle. That's where she's from & here I am. She doesn't live here most of the time; that is, her band doesn't & so she doesn't—

OK then. Why?

She told me about living here, the old neighborhoods, the bands she saw when Seattle was so obscure it wasn't even a secret. She told me how she'd come back over the years, her band sometimes splitting for awhile, come back here, hang around, walk for hours thinking, thinking some more—

She used to live the band's guitarist, love like a made & kept & treasured wound, & they had awhile til he backed off, now he's married to that blonde girl, the wound in all this was not that she still pined but that she accepted—

Fuck, this is going to hurt.

xix.

She didn't believe I wasn't a spy, wasn't a former mushroom. "Truth's a cagey fucker" she'd laugh. I kept this bit of wisdom when I left.

She never confused me for him, not even once, I think she even bedded down with me differently, not less intense, but a sense of later in moments. Mostly new, tight, fresh, knowing, but there was just a small scatter when I felt some truth in her face she wouldn't acknowledge—

Now I don't know. I find myself leaning against a wall, feeling programmed to do so, slumping to the ground, not choosing to do this. Gretta, what's going on here, can you tell me?

xx.

The sky is darker now, hours in a blink. Nobody troubles with me here, I don't even have a cup or a sign to tell my affair—so I wait—& I don't know—I get tired—I try not to doze & it comes like a cover over a birdcage—

Someone sits next to me, on both sides, I flinch ready but they are smiling & guileless—

"I've been where you are"

"Want me to move? Is this your spot?"

Laugh. "I mean your soul"

"How's that?"

"Uncertain, wanting something you can't name. Nobody else seems to feel that way"

"But they do. We all do sometimes" The other one, I realize with a quiet sniff, is a girl—a team—

"Have you eaten?"

"I'm not hungry. I'm fine"

"Are you high? It's OK. We like it too."

"Are you a fucking cop?"

Again the laugh, soft & boneless & without judgement—

"Have you been in Seattle long?"

"Not really. You?"

"We travel. We've been here before. It's pretty, very green."

"But a lot of street kids. Lots of meth & speed. Junk & booze. Runaway girls & that usual nightmare."

"Are you social workers?"

"No, not really. We try to live right, which means compassion & common sense."

"You're in a cult?"

A moment's silence before she says, "I don't think anyone says he's in a cult. That's simply a cruel description from someone who doesn't know or care." Silence. "Or want to know."

This was getting too intense without explaining itself. The were polite enough to leave if he asked but intense enough about their business to *have* to be asked.

He closed his eyes & knew they would wait. If they didn't, was no matter, but he didn't think they would.

An early morning, Gretta going down on him, her long wet tongue doing crazy fucking things down there, enough morning light to silhouette her in red-gold, & she starts humming. Not the usual pleasure of slurping & maybe moaning, she was humming in some part of her mouth & throat not busy with his slavishly hard cock—it wasn't a tune, more a rising & dipping sweetness & he held back coming for the longest time to feed on that song, feed deeper than she was, this was crazy, life was fucking nuts when you were in this moment & he knew it couldn't last & she loved to make him come & swallow every bit down & kiss him deep & comey afterward & he finally let himself not because he couldn't hold off but because she was humming & letting loose with everything in him coming & shouting & shaking & thrashing was all he could do in reply, in gratefulness—

he opens his eyes & lets that moment instruct instruct this one—

xxi.

What won't cohere, bear borders, accept a name, here its long horizon, here its limit, some won't, no tame, no civil, no friendly

What's hard for high & little has ever satisfied, taste this ink, it doesn't like you, it doesn't like anyone, its bitchgoddess the free groove in all—

Slow, slow, let something near, some lively, ceaseless heat, let it try this play, let the fabric tear let the muscles tighten, let the fucking caterwaul til light lost to the morning's arriving king—

More try more they say deep enough in the jungle & men of vine-knowing there an explaining pulse, not bush-heat but what gestates bush-heat, where the source & where bound, ask these men they are not prisoners, fine, close, nearer,

nothing tells, nothing there to tell, collapse the world's molecules yet another way, nothing to tell, the heat is simple, the universe is wet for the slide & the make, til cool, til dry,

What then? What the fuck then? Twitch with every other slave, pretend will, some glance toward truth—

So when something here begins to tame, to cool, to dry, no, sacrifice a body & an ideal, no matter—

Believe nothing, quite, dismiss nothing, ever, even looney—be a bright hurting fang in mind—nameless root blossoms in heart's dreaming—

less afraid to burn it all down & watch it grow again than how green things curl quietly away—

What truth in the passing talky cafe hour—what truth in the king's shouting wane—what truth as the snap breaks & secrets piss out—what truth as the world burns, dwindles, sinks, whimpers its going years—

What truth in the brutality of cities & villages alike, in the great torturing machines of the new century astride the age-old shaming isolating, defeating, acoustic tools known all where & alway?

Don't tell me the books or bullets,
don't tell me the cross or the cunt,
don't tell me the moon or the
desert, don't tell me trees or
mushrooms & dolphins singing in unison—

What truth in the soft nights blazing one's heart with impossible memories, hands holding candlelight, chocolate tipping breasts for several licks, somewhere two break another's neck because they can, because the sound makes them laugh together, what truth on knees or raised to sky, somewhere a motorcycle hurls toward an umber dusk, somewhere men gather around a glow in silence, somewhere the fists won't stop—

Don't tell me you know with a grateful or humble or arrogant smile. Anything you know limits some & eliminates nearly the rest.

Say I don't fucking know & I may not believe this tomorrow but I'm walking now, someone near me warms with trust, I see that motorcycle flying through the air, the world is ending every moment but I believe beginning too—

No tame, no name, no civil, no friendly, no edifice, no book, no plant, no creature, no dream

I am the labyrinthine you walk through me—everything & still dwindling, priceless, fading, you can't, you won't, step by step—

xxii.

Move an hour, two through the darker fantasies, where walls shade an audience, where daylight knowing flakes useless away, where the danger is more a hook than safe, soft, comfort, an hour, two, there's no complete return, periods of cease, of refute, then another hour, two, no explain but those damn dreams, the shaking waking kinds

Near, & still nearer, breath quick & ragged, breath beautiful, words take back their claws, their unholy snap,

an hour, two

this world in raw belongs to no man or steel-clad polity, notices few & great, tiny roars of civilization,

but a curious, creeping eye in the night, something live pushes off something dead,

an hour, two

xxiii.

Worry it repeats, worry when refrain, worry how again breeds again, worry bout the wane, worry bout the wane, worry bout the wane—

fuck it says the mushroom, there's the door, in your hand the song, your breath & beat click along, the rest is the waste when hours caged to some trifle—

& fuck the idea of anything trifling, every last grit matters, there's beauteous burst in all, nothing is everything is nothing is remember that old rhyme?

World not resting against a wall to be cuffed for its explain, world broils through simple & complex, world comes again & again a hustler best when trying to collect two dollars from cat A to pay cat B the three he owes, wine to water, pink skirt short enough to plain the tale & yet smart thighs grin & keep it, two kings lie like old whores when they preach peace between them, your daily paper more like blue tissue completing a thin brassiere's wavering scam, aliens walk among men with hardly better wishes,

"Ask the swaying green light,
do you really mean go?
Where the freedom in yes?

"Ask the summer-stilled red,
    do you really mean stop?
What if nobody does? Are you ready?

"If the light falls, when they hit,
    are you ready?"

Mix three guitars with a bitchiness
for better & something like that—

xxiv.

What won't calm, even in the bed's golden silence, what bites any light nearing hand, the brutal of remembrance, the metallic unsentiment of hope, nothing fine but hard & sharp, when the heart cries squeeze it a little more, make it work to breathe, make it love for stay not soft—

Still, the vine eaters of eternity, again, a why for fine ass's siren, a why for kings mad want to clash bloods, the bright stupor of feeding masses, how the countless beauties of the world & still a body in lone sickness wanes, merchants great with bags of coin & fine green acres tap fingers & calculate new gain—

xxv.

A mile thick of pages scrawled a thousand thousand yawps & songs, what of any of it, the hours are now years, continents of miles, endless the not knowing, the chase, the limp, the corrode of want's twist with music—

hardly begun, another ragged sheaf of high notes, the first, the only, its weeks, its years

Off a closed bank a mute rune in red reflects among other lights bouncing through each's reflections passes by a neat pale beast hurry hurry hurry!

Answer in rare hours, or the rest, or none at all, or nothing to answer, what to answer, nothing to answer—

xxvi.

Sing it true, tonight feel the labyrinthine, more a how, more a covering, a great swallow, no calm in it, no steady to travel or mull, sing it true how every hour wants its golden brute point, sing it true knowing no other way, what truth, what anything,

How fine this Universe of strew & ferment! Its beautiful slaughter & re-invent. How it shapes to no plan, no moral, no story any hands have ever gathered to tell—

No answer. When the temples burn, when they build again, nothing. When the great

preacher his eyes golden round for a moment, when the king, walls to his answers, ceilings to his cries, the beautiful torso tapped for more, or simply taken

look to trees, look to the vines, look to those bright dead stars, look close to most private dreaming, look wide where all put a hand in toward hope's row—

Praise, universe, several, many, countless, & I don't know, & I don't know.

And I don't know. A gift. I don't know.

Labyrinthine, hour delicious, how purr, how undulate, how softest red wings & green gobs of melody—

One sound bears all if any could listen that much. One sound, one note, if only

& again I don't know, I fire & languish with some melodic faith, one hour's long try & carry it through several's drag, faith crackles unknown but I call it Art, I call it love, I say Universe bear the whole of your song & listen!

xxvii.

I take the bridge of glass, & whatever I am now, this is my way, I know that. It has no sides & sometimes it's so clear & quiet I wonder if it's there.

Try to remember. Try, fucker! There are always answers. My grandpa said you got five senses & another. Use them five, good, but don't forget the other.

So I'm walking on a fucking bridge from a bad memory to something else. I don't know if I create it or it's just sitting there waiting—the bridge arches up, becomes steep, becomes very steep, becomes impossible to move but to hang on the sides

is this right? There's go to be more here! What's the point?

"What's the point! I won't let go but I can't move forward!"

Silence. "What's the point? What's the point?"

The bridge seems to level off a bit. How bout that. But it's still not leading me anywhere.

What would you say, 'Stina? Laugh your skanky ass off at me.

No. I'm not like that. I never was. That's how you saw me.

Why am I seeing you now? Are you all my guilts & stupidity in one package?

No. I'm here because nothing's ever fully revealed. Not even your own thoughts.

That it? Thanks. Lots of help. I learned all that Socrates dope a long time ago. It's true. So what. It's true, & so what.

You asked what I would say, & you were wrong.

What else?

As much as you want. Always as much as you want.

She's gone. The bridge is flatter again. I look back. The S & G is gone, nothing back there. I'm not sure how this works but I seem to have some control. I still don't know the fucking point

but alright, I can see how I'd end up here.

"Too many books, sonny," my granpa would say. He was right in a way. He'd show me things to top what I was reading about.

I don't think he disliked books, I think he more distrusted them. "A book's a tool, sonny. Dumb & direct like that. Use the right one. Sometimes none work." I really didn't understand him but I listened like it was breathing & food & safety. He talked to me like I don't know if anyone did ever again. Maybe 'Stina. That's funny. My granpa & some skank. My fucking gurus on a glass bridge out of an old doper's den.

Don't tell me the Universe doesn't have a dark fucking thought or two sometimes about its contents.

xxviii.

I walk down the club's long hallway, well past the manager's office where the barman kindly invited me to sleep. What would he think now if he forgot something, his wallet, & came back, & looked in on me, & saw the door open & the room empty.

I decide: I'm not going back there. I'm dreaming, I'm dead, I don't know but I'm going to keep along until something happens, whatever it may be—

It goes on & on, would I begin to get a little footsore if I was dead? I try to fly & can't. What then?

I don't realize how silent it is & dark too until I see flicking light up ahead, & crackling. It's a fire, up there, a big one!

Then I'm walking on grass, no path, no hallway walls anymore, there are tall pine trees, & a full moon overhead, & I look back to see no club behind me.

I still have my book, which is surprising. I suppose it & my slinky outfit worn for *him* prove some continuity in whatever's happening.

The fire is pretty far away, down a hill. There are shadows around it, people. I wonder if I have to go that way, how much choice I have in this. I try moving toward some woods ahead to see if I can. Nothing stops me.

But who are they? Could they tell me what all of this is?

If I had no choice I'd resent approaching them but since I do I find I want to.

Wishing I was wearing something less obviously showy, I walk slowly over. It takes awhile & it seems the hill is miles down, & the fire gets no closer.

I stop. What now, Genny?

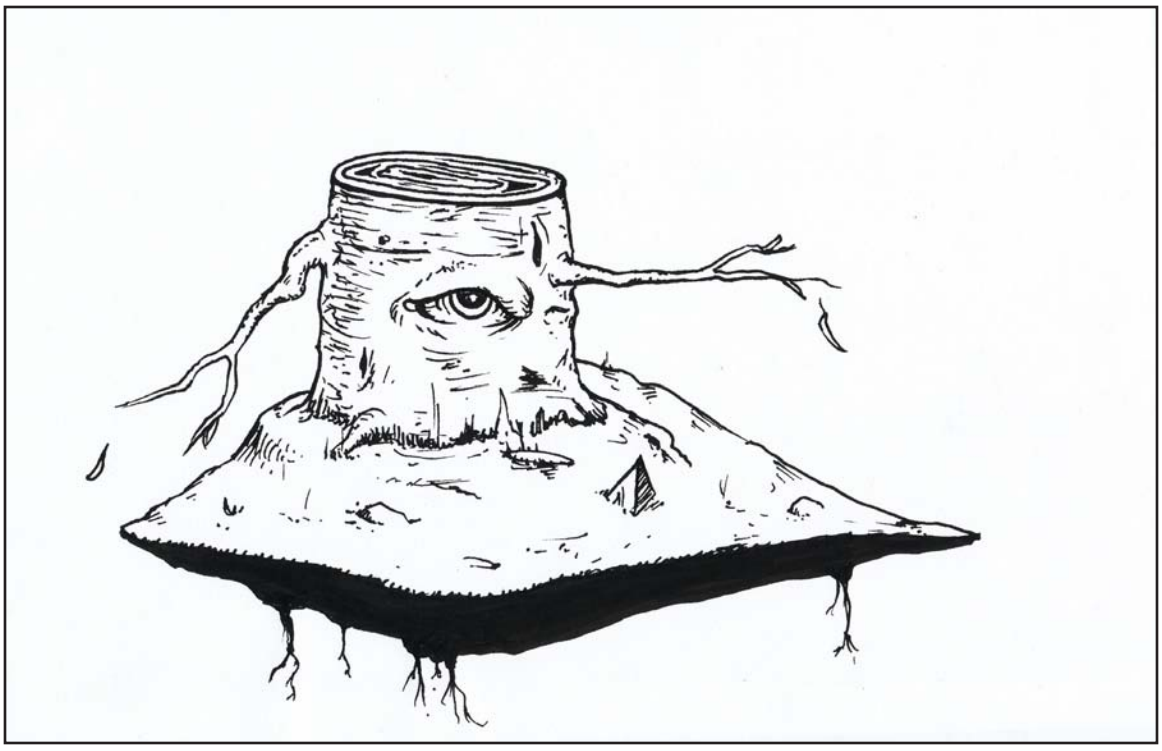
Sit. Stop & sit. Something he might have said with that least smile of his. I suppose I did want him. Why wouldn't I? Was that why he didn't come that night? Was he afraid what would happen?

Or was he trying to reject me less harshly?

The sound of drums comes up to me from down there. Hippy drums. Quite a few. And voices, shouts.

I remember days like that. Beach parties. Parking lots outside rock shows. Being 16 & totally fucking immortal.

I make myself stop crying. Watch. Wait. Something will happen.



AbandonView

xxix.

I don't go with the great bird. I ask him to give me awhile & then come back to check on me. Do I ask this like I know what I'm doing? No. I ask the great bird to understand me & hope it works. He leaves & I don't know if I'll see him again. Beautiful bird.

She had a perfect ass. Round & tight. For awhile I was her master one & all. Shit, why do I keep coming back to this?

I liked tying her up, relished it. She never complained but I don't think it did much for her.

She didn't know where I'd been & didn't ask. I think she was afraid to know too much.

She loved me for awhile but I made clear how it was. She was my fucking piece. She was really good. Perfect ass.

But before had been other things. So I'm not surprised I'm here. I'd been trying for this.

There's a lot I can do if this is controllable.

I told her how I wanted her to dress & it pleased her. As college smart as she was, a mind bookish powerful to take on any comers, she really brightened when I told her very short plaid mini-skirts would please me no end.

I'd gone beyond it all, frankly. I was burnt & wanted to glide for a long while. I could have, with a different set of friends. But they took me along.

Maybe she knew, I've never considered it. I'd met her somewhere, I won't say more, & we'd stuck close along the way. Awhile now.

How does this do anything toward this present tangle? I don't know.

I'd had a wife. I wasn't wanting for another ever.

So I need to see her.

xxx.

I walk out the damned door. Nobody tries to stop me at first, til a guard notices me.

"You can't leave."

"Why not?"

"It's not your time?"

"I think it is."

"People don't just *go* when they will."

"Look, man, I'm not stopping & it will hurt you to keep me."

He looks at me. Pauses then shakes his head. "OK. Take me on if you want to. I've wrestled quite a few." Crouches, beckons me. Ready.

No. I'm not going to fight. I wonder if the bird would have worked out better.

But then unknown to myself I punch him & he goes down really hard.

Well, then. I decide to keep walking til the next impediment comes.

xxxi.

The word is "seaweed" & it's where I met you that day in my childhood, that one *best*

day. I was standing by the ocean which someone had brought me to, it was a lesson, I think, a metaphor, a parable, someone was always trying to fucking *teach* me something back then.

I couldn't listen. I had never seen anything as beautiful as the ocean. I listened to it for the longest time, that story the waves keep telling, opened my eyes & watched the waves arrive along the shore, if there was anything I've experienced since of beauty, it was somehow kin to that moment. The sun glaring hard & hurting, the sight of a large dog chasing into the water after a stick his man threw for him. Voices, shouts, frisbees.

The seaweed on the edge intimidated me a bit. Thick & slimy, I touched it very tentatively.

She was there. Suddenly. One moment, seaweed, next moment, my friend. We looked at each other & I saw her eyes range from the bright green of the seaweed to the blue-grey of the waves.

She was nude. She was older than me, had a woman's body. I looked around quickly but nobody noticed us. That is, nobody noticed *her*.

"Hi, Maya."

"Hi. How do you know my name?"

"Nobody can see or hear me but you. Don't worry."

"You don't have any clothes on!"

"It's OK, Maya. Clothes don't really matter."

Her name took me awhile to learn. It involved three whistles and hard & soft breaths.

I called her Samantha. She smiled.

She hasn't changed. Or aged. Or dressed.

"Hi, Maya."

I smile. "You came."

"Of course"

"I don't know what to do. I left my, um, friend's house. We had a fight."

"You didn't feel him intimately anymore."

"No."

"Did you ever?"

I look hard at her shifting eyes. "I haven't felt much in awhile. That's why I need you."

She smiles. "I was waiting. We had our agreement. But now it's time we went somewhere."

Samantha begins walking & I follow, noticing, as I didn't when I was a child, how beautiful she is. The strong, sensuous arch of her back, her brown-green hair thick to her waist, her buttocks tight and round, her legs those of a natural athlete. Yes, I follow her.

We go neither left nor right. How like her!

xxxii.

What I know is the beast never sleeps, burns til dry & out in one & then hard thrills through the next, never sleeps & suffuses the Universe, no escape any can point to solid & say near this, see it unclench for you, see the sweet to escape to, none, preachers, kings, artists, the highest, tightest prettiest wettest, moaning, reaching, arching, piece of golden ass at midnight's

widest finest moon will go old bones in hardly a time, release atom by atom to the earth & other making plans. What I know is how raw the desire, how the bitch yearn fleshes every flesh, bones within bones, no slogans, no skirts, where feeding & breeding source no man can cut to with pole or reason, lift out a beating heart & watch it reach its cease & know nothing new, cry together every disparate formula for air & time & desire & music, go on, nothing, maybe dissect a memory for a glimpse, maybe live between dreams, what I know is that men will not win. Someone said truth is usually sad, I don't know, I don't know, I don't know.

The hurrying slows, the snarl becomes growl becomes croon becomes wheeze becomes relax. What then, come on! Someone else raising new blades & news songs as the box lowers, as the dirt tumbles in—

The hour is golden anyway, the minute impossibly bright with twists of hope small & large, I wish to be its prayer—listen—one night I dreamed about a wall of sunsets, every one slakelessly beautiful, one or two cartoons & no less so, & I was crying, this dream flipped me over, broke me again & again, I kept passing through new dreams & telling of it, what was it? A wall of sunsets, each one unique,

The hour is golden & a stranger as it goes, its dusky grey light not that of a wall of sunsets yet here it is, the day was ugly plastic hours I vowed to write to try & make good, to try tonight, struggle & try, try,

My pen snarls, growls, croons, snarls anew, I cry out to my faith in Art because I have no other, here I am, Art, help me, Universe, the Labyrinth is me, my place untold, my world unexplained, why does the blood fly? I move one room to the next & hardly say a thick fist's word to anyone—

Help me, Universe, make Art good, help me Art, make this universe good—I do not give up—I will not slumber—I will feel no matter the roar of hurt—I promise—in dirtiest, worst hours I promise—

xxxiii.

Bowie fucks the girl his first night there. An odd fuck silked in comfort, sympathy & acceptance. She's neither passive nor a deathpraying freak, she enjoys, invites him to enjoy too, witness with her in their heat what she is & what she offers,

but maybe it turns out rough, not a lot but she is young & his demons are hard & fine with age, she rolls onto her perfect flat stomach with just a bit of reluctance, flinches to the practiced seeking thrust of his ass-hungry cock, grunts in what couldn't really be called pleasure when he soft, soft, soft, hard thrusts into her, hands under her, squeezing her tits hard enough to hurt a little more than pleases—

"Shhh" he says, several more thrusts, suddenly he likes it like this & his cock explodes, his cry a soldier's not a lover's—

sleeps on the floor & prepares to be gone by daylight—still panting, still stiff, not sexually aroused but some more primitive taut, doesn't fucking matter, this is America, what he had for a moment isn't what's wanted, what's sold on the streets—

she crawled into his loose splay & fell asleep still gnawing at his chest, hard sharp little teeth grawing & gnawing—

daylight came & he did not go—found himself watching what he could of brightening mountain & sky—a blossoming tree branch just outside—the air much cooler than Seattle's had been—not close, not humid

Where was he come now? His recent hours are shattered & yet the nude girl sleeping face close to his heart—

right on his heart—face now turned slightly & listening, dreaming along his heartbeat—

Gretta told him a story one night, there were several bottles of wine & she was blowing his mind with Miles Davis's *Bitches Brew*, he was unsure he'd heard it before yet remembered his Miles-is-God period, every LP, posters on the wall, yet here it was with this killing lovely woman, good red wine, lots of it, a fat joint, & this story, her great-grandmother, it was summer, she lived by the Pacific, she had been a very famous artist who didn't show pictures anymore & one night she woke Gretta up deep in the night, a full moon, & carried her out the door so nobody else would hear, down to the ocean, the whole scene one ripe for fairies & savages but just the two of them & the ocean's ferment & the moon

"This is God at work, Gretta-bird," she'd whispered. "I came out here like this one too many nights & realized me painting my soul out did not good. I would never match this." She'd kissed Gretta's cheek & left. Gretta shivered, & watched for hours.

xxxiv.

Universe of strew & ferment & its rhythms seem more beautiful the plainer. Look for gestures cupping their feeling, cupping like flames. Look for what rawly strides by necessity blind to elevators & protocol.

Care for thoughts that bear their changing passage through hours, neither blot what's been nor too many prayers to it.

Notice what hides among words & shadows, when a leader will not say yes or no but patience, awhile on, then we'll know.

The years break again & again, what seems solidity is simply endurance, the tide comes & comes, sun parts & comes new—

If it were something in these pages it would be tough, it would care, walk its music true—the complex & simple in this world weave toward the same place. Here now. Here always.
Here everywhere. Here forever.
Nothing lost

Universe of strew & ferment I feel lost & I'm not single in this. No sureness in limb or faith unassailable.

But something else—best of felt truths in motion, a kinesis of prayer & its validation, God is dancing tonight if anywhere, if anything, if not one & all, God is dancing, what else could this flight be sure in its arrival?

Answers less sure than breaths, & breaths finite, questions combust with the annihilation of answer or they clog & rust, what I want to say is some bear traps, traps disguised as promise,

chase after me, chase after me, chase after me, lookee here, lookee here

My question, its trapping hooks, its rusting near, is want, why want, why want? Why want?

Why want. None tell me. None tell one another.

What next question, if indeed free of this one, is that possible? Want the cage, the hooks, the drown, or the thread through the labyrinthine? Dark pearl in every running blood, fine high moonlight in velvet shimmering hips, first touch in wordless shy, ever wish for the next

Yes til it snaps, how many countless kinds?

Question, thread, trap, hook, & thus, what, to? What does the world's plain magick say?

Walk true, say yes. Speak true, say yes.

xxxv.

Ask what the world & a hundred shouts back, world as evolution, world as ferment, world as cookpot of countless souls, world to learn, world to love, world to test, world to survive, world among many worlds, cmon, give it, some answer must stretch a little farther, must bite a little deeper—

Cmon, give it, something to explain the hoary velvet dusk tonight & the gunfire some miles far—cmon, give it, some dearest nugget in a strong, tender hand, pass back & reveal how all crosses all, how beauty & foul twins in truth barely knowable one from another—where dreams fairly web through, what great shaft around which all spins—

something, no? Something, sweet beneath the complex of time, of flesh's brutal wants & ceaseless entropy—

something, more than a fine word like love or music, something for deep wood empty riverbed nights & dustless great computer servers kept ready for a thousand missiles' sleek launch—

something—

Follow it down into the street's grime, into the dulling daily noise, the he-said-she-said-and-then & hardly more, bring your high ton of ideas to smoky traffic jams & carnage-smiling TV news reports, out to where the knives whir mechanical & cowflesh parts & falls in cry & rhythm—what is the thread through & back—

what the thread, & a hundred shouts reply, nothing true over another, a cacophony of urge—

& an unliked question: does it matter?

The golden fixtures, their dear light web shadows & subtleties, a mystery in this room, thousands of years, mounted on cliffs of flame, from up here a partial view of the Labyrinth, maybe enough if any could get here, followed the clues & refused less—

xxxvi.

Each of them in the labyrinth, labyrinthine more to the, yah, fuck, what means any of it because I don't know, I call most of it noise between feeding & breeding, I call most of it so inconsequential—what matters then, what matters, how to shuffle or discard or diffuse this mess to a playable tune or two—

Nobody knows, I keep asking & looking & there is no answer anywhere—there is talk of war & ideology—none of what it means to be alive—what precious lost when a body falls—is something precious lost? Maybe there the question again—does it matter?

I ask not to diminish but to wonder at least among these obscure pages if lives are not expendable, if it is possible to take this idea as a premise—

Would this be liberating? If no life's loss mattered more than another, if grief struck equally for a kin & a stranger—if death was devalued by the individual & raised by the race—each death a matter of tears for all—

I ask because I see the world lessing its estimate of persons all the time—covering up death with words, with lies, with moments of silence to a question asked—

Each of them in the labyrinth, to learn & suffer, brought there, a hand moved pen & thus & so. It works.

Each of them also to enlighten what I'm missing.

As the vision takes over & my eyes fall to darkness, what is that room, old & beautiful, I have to give it to them, to pass through, give what I have left, which is little.

"You'll know this room because it will feel very old, many centuries, because its lighting is elaborate & elusive, more shadows & angles than seems possible. You'll pass through it, in a hurry, but I say slow, stop. This is important. This room matters to you inestimably. Having reached this room you have a greater prospect than thought possible."

Do I control or know the Labyrinth? I don't think so. I'm not sure what it's supposed to be to help. Or if it helps at all.

I am atwist with these things & little clears very often. Then there is music sometimes & I seem to know.

Now it continues.

xxxvii.

One night I danced in an electric labyrinth & told a stranger the story of the Minotaur, Ariadne's thread, & so on, I was luscious with the moony desert night & long sips of haha juice I walked the electric labyrinth, swinging with it back & forth til arriving in its center, the stranger asked if I was the Minotaur what a strange question—

I stayed days away from these pages, scribbled tittering little notes but did not approach otherwise—

I wanted to find the book here I could write smoothly, thought I did, the book not made of rags & rages, the one I could hand around to anyone easily—

No. This book is like war, it never leaves & never refines, little explains yet so much bears—this book is like want, like the pull toward fecund flesh, toward bright fruit, toward the melody-wrapped beat going on tonight & every night—

I want to say more, how the lights glare too plainly in this coffeehouse—how the music isn't dangerous enough—how the patrons are tired & fold within, how I wish for sudden conflagrations day after day—

It will remain rags & rages, simple, & thus its shamble, & thus its elusive high—

Nothing much around excites me like this messy undone book, what it might become even if most likely that's not liked by many—its wish to stay, to prosper on its freak path, to demand a bit more than other books—learn how—

Not wishing to stop yet this gnarled beauty, this extended slop, this embrace so waiting to burst, this ink churching these many pages with love, with the ludicrous—

What happens next see a shift here, a crack in the gears & beams, much set up may fall over with a clouding cracking thus—what's left, what's new will be uncertain, maybe always—

A promise to fill the pages to come as I do—a little melody, a little desperate, willingness to speak up—

I keep falling into dreams where everything is melting to the touch—I wake up & distract solidity about me—who is tricking who? Wake to pressing hands & tight voices

are you OK? are you injured?
we can call a doctor—lie still let us sit a bit together—

When it resumes it will be somewhat
different but how I do not know
nor if that will stay either—
this book's truths are diffuse at
best—

this moment each of the six persons in this story are approaching each other, from different angles & dimensions, years, roads, wishes

approaching to arrive, I don't know
maybe always approaching,
a book who will not let up
too many half-built places, too
many secrets nobody will find—

the fade toward dreams now—

A page nearer, & what melts behind without new, cast in this morning for some staying hour, a memory tacky to the heart, clung within it, & what comes? Fragments, less, a few words at a bus stop, the alien becoming of a loved face, one night the stars lured, hinted their depths—

What comes? Music wastes little with sentiment, wants for the flow, wants for the want, music cares for what lacks tame, what binds to nothing—

What comes? Love for the next page, how new it will strike, how deep it will blow—

What comes? Cup faith but shun the hook & pinch of beliefs—

What comes? The next page will blow this moment wide, deny its all, its ever way the secret hustle in things is never stop moving, you *can't*, you *must*, you *try*

To be continued in Cenacle | *71* | *December 2009*

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Judih Haggai

When the News is Good

all bones relax
shoulders rejoice
backbone applauds
when the news is good
belly softens
heart pumps a waltz
liver is smiling
breath plays a minuet
fingers lubricate
mind is on clear
when the news is good

One September

in rush, a sweeping watermark
one lone shard, one lone remnant
we lived here long ago
we barefoot, silly artists
creating heavenly earthenware
all for one
till we all fell down
one large rush
swept away one september
while water weeps
tears become tides
and the cycle goes on

My Bedroom Wall

it's not so much the writing on the wall
or the thoughts that burst through paint chips
it's more the music that strokes my pencil
that convinces me that words are worthy
that thoughts deserve to stand a while
or lie blatantly face up, daring the eye
provoking the mind
claiming a day even, stretching fame to make it last
it's not so much
but it's a lot

it's a joke played on an ethos
a strike against puritan work ethic
a spit in the face of mr. clean
it's a total revolution on my wall
graffiti would be proud of me
though, truly, it's not so much

In an age of anti-matter

in an age of anti-matter
doesn't matter
no worries
we worry
we sit in quasi meditation
or not, to be in zen totality
or not, how little it takes
to fill our void
yet void is so lusciously empty
lots of space between the ears
rattling or revolving
been taught to focus
been trained to unfocus
colliding entities
one on one
doesn't matter much
we worry
no worries
with luck pops a poem
a song, a moment
a cocoon of laughter
twirling like the steam of a finjan
bubbling liquid
from cup to cup
one on one
we cease to worry
we miss nothing
we miss it all
the mist carries our mind to sweet reveries
we see nothing
we see it all

Ralph H. Emerson

D Is for Down

(Editor's Note: Recent essays in this series appeared in Cenacles *#65-69, which can be found at http://www.scriptorpress.com)*

D's a drag, a heavy letter. With its right side bent out of shape, a D looks like it's been dragged onto the page with a tow-rope, and its Greek form delta Δ looks like a giant sand pile. While its phonetic partner T is a letter of ascent—a tree soaring toward the sun—poor D is always earthbound, dug in and rained on like a soldier in a foxhole. Even its onomatopoeia is monotonous, the *din* of rain *drumming* on a helmet. As the letter of falling, D is perforce a watery letter: *drown, drench, drizzle.* The ideas of 'falling' and 'falling water' cling to it worldwide. And because *down* often leads to *dark* and *damp*—to wells, caves, and fogs—many European languages also use D as the letter of *darkness*, of all *deep, dark* things: *dreary* gloom, *dumb* ignorance, *devilish* evil. Its prefixes are negative too: *de*-activate, *dis*-engage, *dys*-function.

More than most letters, D's travel in packs. Auctioneers live by "the three D's—*death, divorce,* and *debt.*" A rich New Yorker steps over a homeless guy and sees city life "spelled out—*decadence*, *disparity*, and *despair*. Three D's. A bad report card." *Dull as ditchwater, dead as a doornail, dumber than dogshit*. If a letter's alliterations reveal its character, D's is relentlessly gloomy: "a chronicle of *defeat, debacle,* and *despair*," "*demoralized* and *depressed*," "*dreaming* of *death* and *dissolution.*" And while most alliterations stop at three words, D's keep on going: "old London's *dirt, disease, degradation,* and *depravity*," "the physical *difficulties* and *dangers* of *dismantling* and *disposing* of the *debris*." Sometimes they bounce right into adjoining sentences. A critic calls Deirdre O'Connell in Marlane Meyer's dark comedy *The Mystery of Attraction* "so credibly *distraught* that she looks genuinely *debilitated* and *defeated* as she exits," admires Barry Del Sherman's "wry *deadpan* . . . pained and self-*deprecating,*" and sums up their play as a "*dark* comedy" with a "*dissonant* chord" about the "*destructive* illogic of the heart." Only the lyricist Cole Porter was ever able to trick D into being cheerful: "It's *delightful*, it's *delicious*, it's *de-lovely.*"

Down

The late William Safire found it "curious, how many words beginning with *d* are downers." He meant words like *despondent* and *dejected*, terms for 'down in mood': *downhearted, down in the dumps.* In truth, every kind of descent clusters around D, both 'falling' and 'pushing down', either literal or figurative: *dig*, *delve*, *drill*; *descend, decrease, diminish.* As I said before, D likewise rules all 'watery descent', both the falling of water itself (*drizzle, drain*) and the falling of anything inside it (*drown, dregs*). Water is world's great Falling Substance, constantly descending as sweat, tears, streams, and rain. So inescapable is this, that you'll see, if you look closely, how even the most neutral terms for descent often have a hidden watery side: *dip, drop, droop, duck, dive*, *dampen*. In East African Somali, the verbs for 'fall' and 'rain' are almost indistinguishable: *da'ayya* with a pharyngeal, *da'ayya* with a glottal.

In English and elsewhere, many 'watery descent' words like *droplet* begin with the letters *d-r.* Many relate to the body: *drink, drool, dribble*. Others relate to the body in water: *dive, dunk*, *drench*, take a *dip* in the *drink*. Dutch for 'swimming' is *dreven*, akin to our *drift*. You can also enter the waters of the unconscious by *drifting off* to sleep: *doze, drowse, dream.* Or by reading, which offers "a *dream* into which you *sink* as if into a *drug*." (Spanish for dream, *sueño,* has the same *sw-* as *swim*.) One can also enter dreamy waters by *drinking*, making a "headlong *descent* into the *depths* of alcohol," and living there *dazed* alongside the "*drifters, dreamers,* and *dopers*." Submersion is dangerous: "drowning" in *debt* or *deficits*, "engulfed by *despair,*" sunk in "*deep* depression." DiCaprio's drowning character in *Titanic* was Jack *Dawson*, and Fitzgerald's *Tender Is the Night* chronicles the plunging fortunes of poor *Dick Diver.*

Deep, Dark

When water drops in English, it goes *drip-drip-drip.* In Japanese, it goes *tara-tara* or *dara-dara*. In Somali, 'to drip' is *dararayya*. See the *d-r*'s? Rain falls on *dirt*, and the Somali verb for 'moisten the ground' is *darbayya*. When *dry* ground gets wet, we call it 'mud', or *doro* in Japanese. Mother Earth is wet: fertile earth usually is damp if you scratch below the immediate surface, and *dowsers* find deeper water for *drinking wells,* whose insides are *dark, dank,* and *deep,* like a *dungeon*. One of Camille Paglia's favorite words in *Sexual Personae* is *chthonian*, meaning 'earthy, within the earth', from *Chthon*, Greek for Mother Earth. Paglia also likes to mention the Venus of Willendorf, a famous fertility figurine that she uses as shorthand for the lush fruitfulness of women's bodies: "Venus is *drowsing* and *dowsing*, hearkening to the stirring in her sac of waters" (56). In China, there's a blanket name for all of this—the damp, the dark, the lowness, the earthy feminine fecundity. It's all part of *yin*, the feminine principle; the opposite of masculine *yang*, which is light, dry, and airy.

I don't want to stretch the comparison, but in general, D is a yin letter, low, dark, and wet; while our yangiest letter is H, all *high* and *happy*. The great preacher Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. often opposed these two letters in his speeches, using D for lowness and darkness, H for height and light. Watch how he uses D to evoke a lightless valley in his famous speech "I Have a Dream": "Now is the time to *rise* from the *dark and desolate* valley of segregation to the *sunlit* path of racial justice." Elsewhere he evokes his "sunlit path" with H's. One speech tells of "a *highway up* from *darkness*." The "Letter from Birmingham Jail" asks us to "help men *rise* from the *dark depths* of prejudice . . . to the majestic *heights* of understanding." America's Negroes have "decided to *rise* from the *dark dungeons* of complacency to the *bright hills* of creative protest." See how all of King's phrases assume that as you go up, it gets brighter; and conversely that if that you stay down, you'll stay in the dark? That's apparently how it works in our minds: D is down, and down is dark, so D is dark too.

Dim and Dusky

Ideally, black, the darkest color of all, should have a D name. It does in Gaelic, where *dubh* 'black' is hidden in a dozen familiar Scotch and Irish names, from *Dublin* ('black pool') to personal names referring to dark hair or complexion, like *Doyle* ('black stranger'), *Dowd, Dowell, Duffy, Dooley, O'Doole, Dougal, Douglas, Dugan.* (Bruce Jay Friedman's 1998 short story "Fit As a Fiddle" echoes that blackness right in its opening sentence: "It was a dark time

for Dugan.") Regardless of language or letter, black is almost always bad. Greek *melas* 'black' makes *melancholy*. French *broyer du noir* means to be depressed—to 'pound the black'. French *noir* is from Latin *niger*, which meant 'wicked' as well as 'black'. Its derivative *denigrate* means 'to slander', with the literal sense of "blackening" someone's name. An old Chinese proverb says that "black-hearted" people slander everybody: "Charcoal writes every name black." The old English recipe for coffee was "Hot as Hell, sweet as an Angel, and black as the Devil."

Many people assume that these expressions are rooted in racism. On the contrary, social racism and linguistic disdain for darkness are twin shoots growing from the same trunk—our inborn hatred for the blackness of night, a hate rooted in biological phototropism, the light-seeking nature that we share with plants and other living things. William Blake's poem "The Little Black Boy" understood this: "White as an angel is the English child / But I am black, as if bereft of light." African languages don't like darkness any more than English does. In Swahili, for instance, the 'light' word *angaa* 'to shine' makes *angavu* 'bright, intelligent', and *zagaa* 'illuminate' makes *zagawa* 'enlightened'. On the other hand, *wesui* 'the color black' doubles as 'gloom, darkness'; *giza*, another Swahili word for 'darkness', doubles as 'ignorance'; and *sawidi,* which means 'to blacken physically', predictably doubles as 'slander'. Until we can see in the dark like cats, human thinking will always favor light.

Darkness means ignorance because in the dark, you can't see what's around you; and darkness is evil because the things you can't see might be trying to eat you. The Pirahã Indians of Brazil say goodnight by joking: "Don't sleep—there are snakes!" Snakes can kill, and death is the biggest darkness, the ultimate downer: one *drops* dead. It's a D even in its euphemisms: *demise, deceased, defunct,* the *dear departed*. And it often strolls around with other D's: *dead duck, dead drunk, death-defying, Dead until Dark, Doomed to Die, Drums of Death*. Agatha Christie was called the *Duchess of Death* because she wrote so many murder mysteries. Norwegians call 'murder' *drap*, and Dickens's last novel killed off an Edwin *Drood* before introducing a shadowy Mr. *Datchley*. These are typical D people. Oh, I know all about Jane Austen's charming Dashwood sisters and her überhunk Mr. Darcy; but really, you're far more likely to meet dubious Datchleys and hapless Droods if you venture into D Town.

Dastardly

And D villains. Fictional characters named with a certain letter offer good insights into that letter's personality, and D has a lot of monsters. Norwegians have an awful seagoing monster called a *draug*, and most European languages have *dragons*. Count *Dracula*, for instance, was named for a real-life medieval tyrant known as Vlad *Dracula*, meaning 'Vlad the Dragon'. Vlad earned that nickname because he liked to kill his own subjects. So did the real-life Greek tyrant *Draco* (which also means 'dragon'). Draco inspired our word *draconian* because his single punishment for all crimes was death. I've also seen more than one fictional villain called *Draco*, and I was amazed to learn that the genocidal Serbian tyrant Radovan Karadzic successfully hid out for several years under the assumed name *Dragan Dabic.* Dastardly Dragan.

Dastardly—what does that mean, exactly? We use it as a playful word for 'wicked', but it originally meant 'cowardly,' a *dastard* literally being a coward. I suppose people confused it with *bastard*, thinking that *dastards* must be special D-like bastards, and therefore 'wicked'. The D dragged the word's meaning into the gutter. The same thing happened to *daimon*, a neutral Greek word for 'spirit' that became our *demon*. It also happened to *diabolos*, Greek for

'slanderer', which became our *devil*—indeed *the* Devil, the Prince of Darkness and Lord of the Underworld. Getting *damned* puts you *down* in his underworld's firelit *darkness*, stuck in D Town for good.

We euphemize the Devil and damnation with the same letter—he'll give you a *dickens* of a time and scare the *daylights* out of you—*dang* it, *darn* it, *doggone* it! Many devilish puns lurk in fictional names: sulphurous *Darryl Van Horne* in Updike's *Witches of Eastwick*, nasty Cruella *De Vil,* sneaky *Devins*, domineering *Damian*s. Other devils too: *Dorian* Gray, crooked Leo *Drummond* in Grisham's *Rainmaker*, deadly Victor *Drazen* on TV's *24.* Former Vice President Dick Cheney reveled in his White House nicknames *Deadly Dick, Dark Side,* and *Darth Vader*. Indeed, *Darth Vader* is the most impressive D villain of all. His name "*Darth*" echoes his obsessions with the *Dark* Side and the *Death* Star, and his costume is a swirling fantasy in pure black.

Dumb as Dirt

As I said, evil is "dark" because it flourishes "in the shadows" where you can't see what it's doing. Light lets you see, so light is knowledge, and lack of it is ignorance. The "enlightened" are wise, while the ignorant struggle "in the dark." Smart people are "bright," while stupid ones are "dim." Or *dumb, dull, dense.* Nicknames for dumb people are a big D specialty. The comic strip *B.C.* devoted a whole Sunday to listing them: *dummy, dum-dum,* and *dumbbell; dunce, dolt,* and *dunderhead; doofus, dope,* and *dodo; dweeb, drip,* and *dingbat; ding-a-ling, dip,* and *dork;* and *dupe* and *dimwit.* That's seventeen! Are there more? Sure. Women can are *ditzes* and *dumb Doras,* Germans can be *dummkopfs*, Frenchmen *débiles*, Russians *duraks,* Somalis *doqons.* As the letter of darkness, D also stands for the darkness of ignorance. Duh!

Naturally, this spills into fictional names. Who's dumber than *Donald Duck* and *Daffy Duck*? *Dilbert,* the Three Stooges' *Dopey Dicks, Dudley Do-Right* in *Rocky & Bullwinkle,* Jim Carrey in the film *Dumb and Dumber,* and *r*ock-brained Lt. Frank *Drebin* in the film *The Naked Gun.* Carl Hiaasen's novel *Hoot* has two D characters clearly named for their lack of brains: the thuggish schoolboy *Dana* ("a well-known idiot") and Officer *David Delinko* ("no Sherlock Holmes"). To be sure, not every dumb character is a loser, but D names often hammer that implication home. I think of Donald Westlake's bumbling thief John *Dortmunder*, the film *Say Anything*'s "likable loser Lloyd *Dobler,*" and the astonishing political factoid that the Oval Office has never been graced by a D president, although D candidates have somehow managed to *lose* six elections: *Douglas* (to Lincoln), *Davis*, *Dewey* (twice in a row!), *Dukakis,* and *Dole*.

Dreck

As the journalist Leonard Cohen says, "the *deep, dark, dirty* secret" of politics is name recognition—and clearly it is also important to have the right initials. But politics is a cesspool anyway, full of *"deliciously diabolical" double-dealing* and *double-dipping,* where honest citizens are *"duped and double-duped"* by the *dirty dogs* in power. Crime's another cesspool. What was the old AC/DC song? "*Dirty Deeds Done Dirt Cheap.*" What's a Parisian *demimondaine?* A prostitute, same as a *drab* in Georgian London or a *drel* in Afrikaans—dirty women, so to speak. Even without its 'dummy' words, D's vocabulary of 'contempt' is huge: *dirtbag, douchebag, dickwad, dipshit, dillweed, dyke, dog, dago.* The conductor Sir Thomas once coined

an unforgettable phrase for music critics: "*drooling, driveling, doleful, depressing, dropsical drips.*"

Drip, drop . . . *droppings, dreck, dung, doo-doo.* Dung is *dirty*, *disgusting,* and 'down', because it drops from body to ground. I always think of *drool* as an unusually disgusting word too, perhaps for the same reason. Somali concurs, giving drool the *d-r* name *darer* (akin to *darorayya* 'drip') and calling dung *digo*. Plop. For many pages, I have been harping on all the ways that D stands for 'down', and especially on its relentless association with falling water. Is there a reason why D means 'down'? Yes, and it's not onomatopoeia, even if dripping water does sound a lot like *da da da da da.*

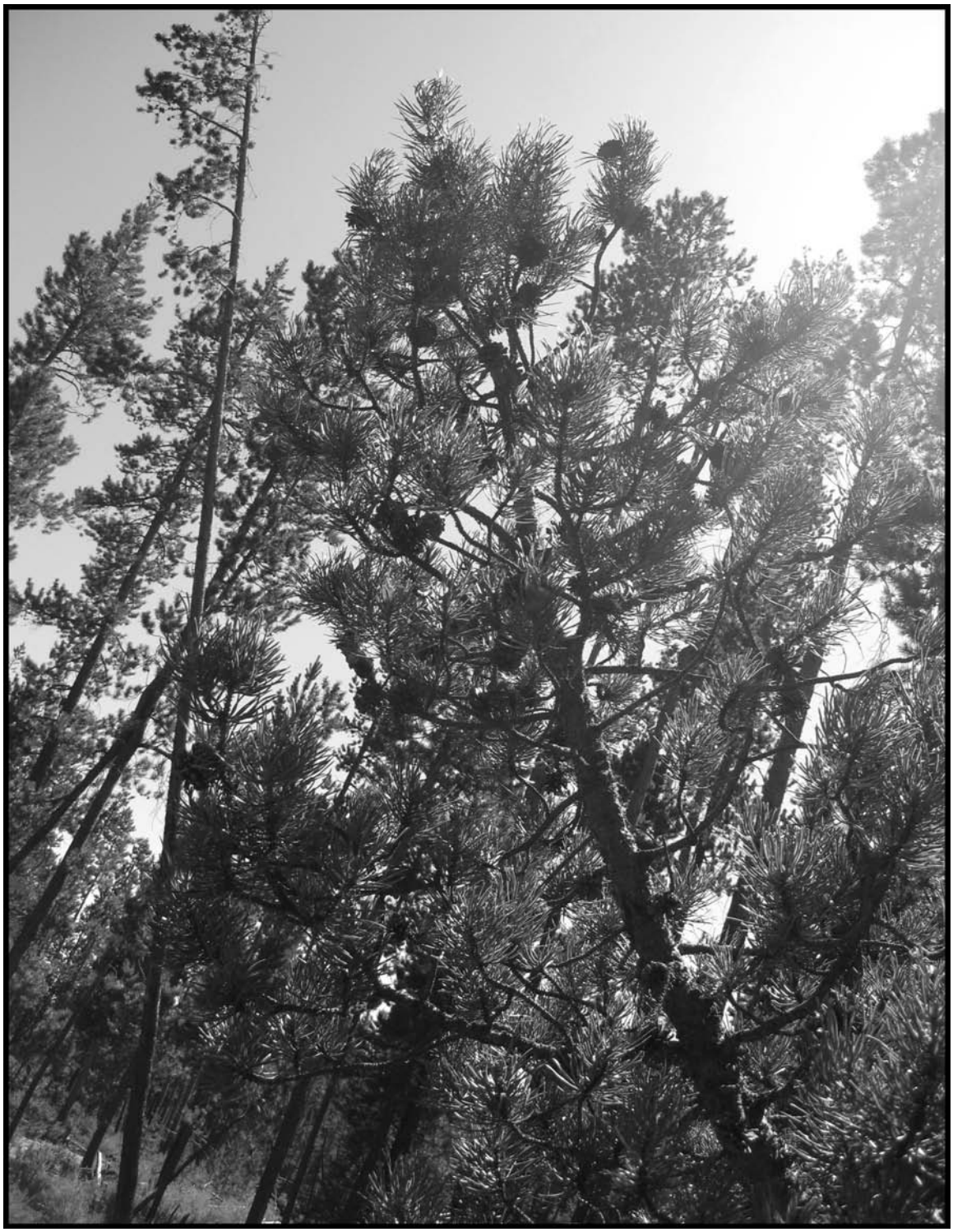
The Fish Elevator

D means 'down' because it creates a physical sensation of downness inside your head and neck when you say it. Say "duh" and your tongue goes upwards, tip behind your teeth. That's the same position it makes for T, the letter for 'up', as in *tip-toe* and *tall* and *top*. But otherwise the sensation is exactly the opposite. Whisper "tuh" and you'll feel its lightness; then say "duh" and feel the thud in your throat as the sound plunges below your jaw like a broken freight-lift. Our vocal cords vibrate strongly when we say D. That vibration, from which T is exempt, seems to "drag" D down.

In effect, the sounds of T and D represent the opposite ends of a *tall* (or *deep*) elevator shaft, in which D is a flood-prone cellar enviously watching T words rise up all day like clouds of *steam*, as in *stairs, strive*, *stand*—or, to use a Somali example, *tagayya* 'stand'. In London and Mogadishu alike, T is up, D is down. Few languages use those letters' up-and-down imagery as insistently as Somali and English, but the imagery has such a strong organic basis that most languages show some traces of it. And it has a touching side effect: because we very often use T and D to make judgments about metaphorical upness and downness, they are really our most grown-up consonants—true thinkers' letters; not as babyish as labials, nor as reptilian as velars.

But D may be a bit fishy, for its original name was apparently *dag*, the old Semitic word for 'fish'. When the alphabet was invented a few thousand years ago, each letter was named for a word that was illustrated by the letter's shape. The Hebrew alphabet keeps the old names, and ours more or less keeps the pictures. D and N are both problem letters. Modern Hebrew calls D *daleth* or 'door', and N is *nun* 'fish', right next to *mem* 'water'. You can still see the water-waves in M, but the other pictures don't match: D is not much of a door, and N looks nothing like a fish. Nor should it, because its earliest shape was plainly copied from the Egyptian hieroglyph for 'serpent', whose body still snakes jaggedly along in our modern N. See it?

In *Language Visible*, his history of the alphabet, David Sacks offers a reason for the mismatch. Scholars suspect that N was originally called *nahash* 'snake', but someone decided early on that the alphabet's 'fish' letter should go next to M 'water', so they renamed N with a different word for 'fish' (*nun*). This affected D, whose name had to be changed from 'fish' (*dag*) to something else like 'door' (*daleth*). But they never changed the pictures, so N still looks like a snake; and our watery D, a rounded form of the older Δ seen in Greek, has always made a lousy door but still makes a nice sleek fish's head. So maybe D was swimming smoothly along in deep waters at the very moment our alphabet was born. I don't know if it's true, but I like to think so.



Ric Amante

Thoughts Upon Encountering a Fire-pit in the Woods

A dozen red and white beer cans
sprawl in surrounding grasses.
A torn blue tarp
huddles at the base of an oak.
On the flattened earth
next to a blackened ring of stones,
a ratty yellow sweatshirt.
The ceremony here was nameless and solitary.
Fire warmed the body,
tempered the desperation,
forged a connection.
The hope and power of flames in the night
kept him safe, enthralled;
the alcohol kept him dancing.
Yet once the fire stopped speaking,
his legs became paste, his mind oozed.
It's all about time, that much was clear,
how its fierce and false directives
can bring a man down.
It's all about time, one moment to the next,
how its calm and quiet study
can set a man free.
I pray that's where he left off last night,
taking the blind and brittle steps
from alienation to insight.

Above the Tree Line

Often not the poem on the page that matters,
but the quality of sentiment building within.
To name the power flowing through
blood and brain can diminish it.
Words engage, reveal, clarify—
yet limit mystery, sidetrack grace.
So right now I'm lying shirtless
on a hot slab of pink granite
in a sun-blasted, speechless trance—
part lizard, part corpse.
I can't say why it's so
or where it comes from,
yet I know the well-being of others
keeps this mountain in business;
if blessings are missing,
this incarnation means nothing.

Bodysurfer to Lifeguard

Sun-tanned voluptuary
perched on a high wooden chair,
I'm gonna make you
earn your salt today.
I'm gonna plunge heart-first
into the surging breakers
like a spray of dolphin.
Gonna pretend I'm deaf
and blow off your calls and whistles—
I respond to deeper vibrations.
Ain't nothin' guardin' my life
but the faith of light and water—
the surf insists—"Come"
Diving under crashing waves
beneath the blast and boil, churn and roil—
it's cool, calm, quiet.
Launching myself just ahead of the crest,
thrashed and burnished and swept to shore—
subsumed, purged, sanctified.
And I'm not really challenging you—
if I do my job well, I'll become fully aquatic,
invisible to your hard bronze gaze.
No need to save me, then,
when the ocean is the haven
I came from and shall return to.
And you, too, when duty ends,
will rush headlong into the foam—
the pull of high surf is a birthright.

My Old Friend Moondog

He's the holy fool on the hill,
exulting in the capabilities
of the Chandra telescope,
fasting on wheatgrass and sauerkraut,
lamenting the unavailability of LSD.
"Future psychonauts will suffer,
our group-consciousness diminish," he says.
He's the hexagonal peg in the global hole,
conversant with moles and dolphins,
composting, recycling, tending pot plants
with egg shells and graywater.
"Water is chemically singular—
neither gas, solid, or liquid, and yet all three—
a miraculous elixir balming the planet," he says.
He's the musical cog in the astral machine,
grafting Stravinsky to cakewalk,
shredding three-chord ragas
on a dead man's guitar
through a haze of blue smoke.
"Music is the bane of entropy,
the sonic life-line shot from
supernova to black hole," he says.

He hasn't worked in seven years,
his wife just threw him out,
I hope he doesn't call me.

The Mind As Mirror

Some mornings constellate in
lovely, solitary thoughts—
like new red and white roses
on the south side of the house.
And these thoughts cascade,
form a flowing empire,
swirl around the bluffs and boundaries
in a soundless torrent of grace.
"Hello life, hello death,
hello lucid blast of late August sunlight—
here we are again,
cycling quietly with the roses."

Jim Burke III

Editor's Note: The following is the twenty-eighth in an ongoing series derived from the correspondence between Jim Burke III and myself, begun in 1992, and in the spirit of the more enthused letter-writing tradition of yesteryear.

July 18, 2009
Hartford, Connecticut

Preface

I rarely include a preface in my letters to you, Ray, but since this one is also an answer to the question that somebody asked you (about my belief that we all become stars when we die) , I thought it best to clarify an important concept. The concept is the subjectivity inherent in the physical realm.

Even the question of what happens to us when we "die" is only answered by subjective thought. I can never escape subjective definitions when talking about the metaphysical plane because this is all I have to work with. So please bear this in mind as I explore and define the word "star" to a greater degree.

We All Become Stars When We Die

My own particular life story begins like so many others. Two people in love in the early 1950s get married and after countless attempts at conception, succeed—the sperm and ovum join to create a human being, unique to the universe: me. My genetic predisposition enables me to become taller than the average person for my generation, with an above average intellect as well—I enter adolescence, adulthood, mid-life, all the while experiencing the joys, sadness, love, and heartbreaks that life brings. However, insights occur that I feel must be shared. The most significant that I have experienced is the notion that we never actually die.

We certainly cease to function in the physical plane, most of us after 70 or 80 years. But when we die, what occurs to our metaphysical essence—that part of us which eludes definition by doctors, philosophers, para-psychologists and other disciplines? I think of my essence as all thoughts and experiences that I have accumulated, and apply these to the notion of metaphysical constructs. One of the absolute constructs is love, pure boundless absolute. Another is truth. I think people have forgotten that truth is a term that, although used freely, has no business being so. Love and truth are what exist only in a spiritual realm. Just as a drop of water becomes the ocean when immersed in it, so does the essence of a person's being when he or she dies. We may become stars individually when we die. A plane with no need for physical actions would be wondrous yet utterly simple. Perhaps we pass through the metaphysical realm to eventually join the cosmic force and become the one greatest life-giving thing that ultimately enabled this planet to sustain the human population (including my parents)—a star! Stars are "born" every second of every day in the cosmos. The Hubble Space Telescope is letting us see

to the beginning of time and, on the way there, the star incubators can be seen. Since the dawn of humanity, countless people have died, countless stars have gone supernova, and countless more have been born.

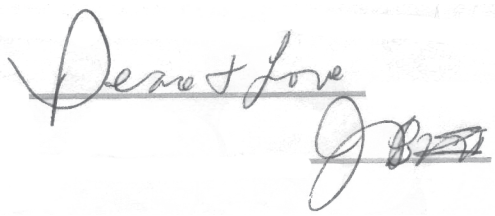
Western thought, however, tends to reduce the death experience to scientific terms, but this method is flawed. Eastern ideas have always blended the mind and body, as well as using analogies like the drop of water and the ocean (i.e., completely apart before, and one and the same after). Our medical science has begun to accept some aspects of Eastern practices; for example, acupuncture is more and more accepted to alleviate a number of ills. But when the physical body dies, our doctors pronounce it so, rituals take place, and our memories confirm the end of the relationship with the deceased, *in this physical world*.

The Eastern philosophies, on the other hand, continually point out that it is not only possible, but that the actual purpose of physical life is to achieve a mind-body connection by discovering absolute truth, then dissolving it. The absolute truth resides within the physical body. When we die, the absolute truth—pure love, unconditional, non-abstract—is released into the cosmos. What actually happens during this process is unknown, and many doubters will rush to point out that this is only conjecture. But I would respond that existence has always been, and we only measure it in the physical plane. Such devices would not exist on the metaphysical plane, because they would not be needed. Time would not exist, at least with respect to relativity, because there would be no need to measure it, to use it, no need to breathe and, finally, there would be no *need* to love. The cycle of duality would be broken, and that is all that would exist: peace and love. Hate and violence would not and could not exist.

In order to take this concept one step further, one has to imagine a plane of existence without physicality. What would be the purpose of existence, or would the purpose of that realm be existence itself? I suppose my original statement wasn't meant to be taken literally, although the possibility is more evident now, especially with a little help from my friends!

I have deliberately avoided discussing "near-death experiences" because all the most commonly disseminated information contains similar reports of people leaving their bodies, looking down on themselves, and following a warm light at the end of the tunnel. They report being sent back (sometimes at the behest of deceased family members or memories), or returning on their own (inexplicably) at the moment of resuscitation. The medical and scientific professions state that this is merely a hallucination, caused by endorphins released into the pleasure center of the brain. Perhaps these chemicals are a built-in mechanism to ease the transition to a non-physical "life." I still believe that:

We All Become Stars When We Die . . .
(then again, maybe stars become all of us . . .)



Raymond Soulard, Jr.

Many Musics

(Fifth Series)

"I believe that the truth of the matter
is far more terrifying. That the real truth
that dare not speak itself is that
no one is in control. Absolutely no one"
—Terence McKenna, "Dream Awake Lecture," 1994.

i. I Was Never Pretty

There was an hour between, maybe less,
but an hour, or at least a between,
when childhood's sense peaked, the apex
of a little truth I return to, that cries
my heart not from sentiment but because
everything that came after, nearly all
of it, was a long, arcing sound of manacles
to the wheel, a choking, a consumption,
a human drive to slave the stars themselves
& make them squeal in capitulant song.

I was never pretty after that. On this cracked
desert floor tonight I confess. I was never
pretty. What I gave hard as any, give hard
tonight & still, is music, many musics.
I wage music against the slavers & hold
the stars will redeem what little truth I still bear.

******

ii. That Mirror Said True

What are the words untold for
other years?
What are the words for all that
floats & fires the night?
What are the words when its joy,
when its hunger, when its fear?
What are the words for the girl
with the stars in her hair?

******

iii. What Remembers Despite

There is the temple.
There is full moonlight.
I choose the temple to look at the moonlight
and listen.

******

iv. Least Prophecy

Burnished in the years are a few faces,
 scatter of hours, a bench, a shore,
a night with stars like & unlike tonight's—
 this face, how I listened! breathed between
the beats—that one, the path I prayed
 in that voice, from word to word to
touch to touch to heart's final blow-up—

 further back, before all the chemicals
hit & heated, I yearned more blindly,
 undivided hunger for cosmos, new kisses,
what thrills the next day or God or
 a new toy might bring—

& tonight, its yellowed knowing of
 the many years gone by, its reluctant
kneel toward the mysteries still curled
 within, & the great barking brightness
to come when at last they burst upon
 some coming hour's calm, expecting air.

******

v. That Idyll

What there is in magic comes to me
when the world is close, very close,
a purring wind, a crying, confessing music,
your kiss at dawn as we lie together,
two smiling, grasping souls, trying to parse
out the pain in men & women which
they push away & revere & call God.

We talked until dreams came & took us
somewhere half-forgetful, not to where
the pain resolves & is gone, but a middle
place, where the hard things in this world
give a little &, if we can figure up
a tool or trick or utterance, perhaps
we'll bring back a map or plan, tell one
& another, know the magic as it knows us.

******

vi. Pathos (To a son or daughter)

The queer of the joke is on those who say
life's tale is told in the hand dealt you.
Four cards are turned over practically
when you're born, but the hidden fifth presides,
it's where you'll find possibility, not chance.
Take your years to show it to others, but
an hour will come. On that hour, turn it!

******

vii. And the other one—

You won't need the sun to direct you
to best thoughts of light, nor too many
books when there's a rhythm or at least
a tinkering breeze nearby. You'll sniff
the bastards, tend the angels, call it a song
by words you'll make, or someone else will.
I won't doubt you, if we meet in this world,
& if not, that's what the harder dreams are for.

******

viii. Flinch-Bow

I was never pretty, but she was,
young & lithe & probably duller
than dust, but she was pretty &
I believed in pretty, its curves,
its colors, how it had to run,
how I had to chase, how I breathed
hunger in every hour & didn't know
how to turn aside, how I didn't
want to, & if she had turned even
once to me & said, "yes?"—

Then there were no words—
the chimes of manuscripts yet to come—
Then there were only the afternoons
we walked home from school on
opposite sides of the street—

Then there were only the nights
I lay in the shadows of her house,
spat my seed to honor her power,
& walked home riven with youth's special
shame, unknowing the better & worse to come.

******

ix. Night Song

Looking out upon the night & seeing
better than a god's possession, I reck
a mystery, a thrilling fury of lights,
a brilliant assurance that men govern
neither this world nor any other,
that myths from open hands & dreams
behind shut eyes are a little closer,
& still not very close at all. That whatever
this messy coalescence, this seeming
discordance of voices & phenomena,
the story yet to be wholly revealed
will ignore, perhaps explain, nothing.

******

x. 4th & Washington

As I tried to understand that hour,
the sea-water rushed my lungs & the more
I parsed out each word & gesture
the colder it got until I was every limb
stiff to my forehead. Slowed beating & breath
but—still beating, still breathing.

I wanted to know what you were to me,
this question I carry between my selves,
their discontinuous hours. What these
metallic clouds? Why those shabby leaves?
What had passed since, & what would not.
How I'd come to love you from deep inside
my own myth, & how I miss the myth
long after I stopped missing you.

The message I bear in my heart,
now gaining its pace, as is my breath, is not
for you but myself. That myth you made
was of sea-water, in your source, and
in your blood, & for every wild choking
you've taken, it will still renew & bear you home—

Whether the suffering & ecstasies are life's
thin foam, or how is learned in human years
the deeper ways of the waves.

******

xi. 10 to the 16th to the 16th

When he was young, the truth & effect
of light on rain water was easy to explain.
Later, as he noticed the discontinuousness
of emotional phenomena, he hesitated.
And finally there was a night of total
darkness, when what sang the world
assaulted his heart. What mattered
so well had passed, & he opened out to the rest.

******

xii. Elemental Beings

There was laughter, & argument over
which beings were demonic, & which
simply impish. "How you can tell,"
said the Master smoothly, a hand coyly
on the bare leg beside him, "is whether
they desert you when the rent is due."
More laughter, more uneasy. "You are
waiting something prettier perhaps?"
Silence. "Most of us could not fly
our way out of a daydream!"

Whether he devoured them then or later
is probably unimportant.

******

xiii. Thirteen

When they buried your voice, & I was
 afar, a stone & a paid patch of earth:
you took what beauty translates worlds,
 & whether or not you still sing it,
I know your music still plays on.

******

xiv. Prestidigitation

Many girls, many stars, many nights
 of hustling among beliefs for a
carnal song, a poem with nice lips, yet
 not romance if not music, & so the years
twisted until my eyes were telling my voice
 when to sing, & when to yearn on.

So I learned this, & maybe less:
 the relief is in the grave but the art
  is shaping questions & chaos to beauty
 & letting it float high out on the wind.

******

xv. Tall Pine in White Woods

What, then, the myth that renews?
If lucky, if obsessed, a man's ideas
will bite his very blood & carry his miles.
An image of being struck & chasing off.
Once, years ago, I was struck & chased
 off, unheeded the voices that called
  to return me to safety. Among the pine,
into the woods, I played the song that lured me on.

******

xvi. The Way is Dis-Illusion

And years ago, on a city bench, the man
I sat with was sad, his woman was young
& had finally fucked him over. I wanted
to give him those words, the ones that heal,
even undo. But there aren't any of those.
I've looked. Healing comes as afterward,
from wreckage, with too many memories
crowding into bed, & mornings that
need something & give little back. I sat
with him & told dirty whore jokes because
that's about all there is. Gave him my hand,
pointed to the moon, the healing comes.

It's dirty healing at best. Hungers return,
again need sating. The way is dis-illusion.
There really are no words that undo.

******

xvii. Stage Was a Planet

Truly when nobody was watching, I felt good
at last. Disappearing, body & memories,
noisy foam, a life, & returned now to the sea.

******

xviii. Psychedelic Dream (iv)

I am in bed, holding a sack of sand,
it is a precious thing, I am afraid,
I am holding it, & now I wake up.

I am dreaming that I am awake &
telling my lover about the dream of
holding the precious sack of sand, she listens.

I wake, but do not, & where is the sack?
I panic & seem to feel it again in
my hands but is it leaking? Am I losing it?

Awake this time? Seems so. The sweat,
the bed lamp, your movements to rise.
How do I hold this sack now, now that I know it?

******

xix. String Theory

Strum the cosmos & make something new.
Down among the strings, the arguments for
harmony get deep & many worlds will go.

******

xx. Prison Planet Blues

When the fat man with the blue doll
who looked like him said it, of course
nobody listened. He held his street corner
day after day, & spoke in deep warning,
nothing to it. Then the first ships appeared overhead
in late summer, silently. He tried to explain
but no, there was something else. We expected
something else, we want something else,
we *deserve* something else! He tried to say,
smoking his cigarettes through their filters,
holding his companion day after day, "what if
you are right? What if the Universe was
created by men? What if they have been
growing you for resources? What if the
doubt slivered into consciousness, & its furious
terror of death, could have been removed
by pulling off your pinkie nail, & bleeding
through to original programming, what life
was before we were marked for cultivation?"

He shakes his head. He looks at his doll.
Looks around his street corner. Nothing yet. No.

******

xxi. Secret

But then you might be me . . . me too?
What of me I do not know, afar, alive,
what are you? You don't look like me,
you don't do what I do. If we connect
by dream, & it holds, there will be more
to say, maybe to sing between us. Sing.
Do you sing? Will you sing to me in dreams?

******

xxii. Things Fall Apart

I remember the hour for each of you,
the one when your face & the moon & the
perfect music I'd been holding til then—
I turned it all onto the pyre & called stars in
to make sure the night burned & many
watched, that what I felt would remember,
& it did, & I do, & I don't know if each
of you does, but what I wonder after
is where are those hours, are there ashes
of them adrift in the cosmos, with yours,
with all of yours, the hours, the faces, the music?

******

xxiii. Leader of Men

There were songs when you arrived
in the capital, & perhaps there will
be more eventually, but from one
hour to the next, one speech and another,
each wonders how to pull your attention,
persuade you a little more. For years,
this jostle, today's cacophony. Another day's song.

******

xxiv. If Not Alone

Could I be walking around tonight
as someone else, too? That is, while I
sit here, I am also someone else
somewhere else? Who would that be?
Who would you be? What is the what
to say to you, to bring you back in dreams?

******

xxv. High Edifice

These bricks run with old blood,
nights when pretty things were consumed
& burned for the pleasure of old gods,
the kind that fade centuries-slow,
for you see, the sweetest elixir prized
by many is to be accepted, told the secret,
& if their piece of it struggles too much,
it's nothing a fist & a manacle won't resolve.

******

xxvi. Hidden Fifth

How to move like the universe moves,
that is, flowing, flowering, evolving,
undulating, & keep moving like the
universe moves, shifting, dancing,
wind on grass, a smiling woman closed
eyes in her passions, & not stop moving
ever again for dreams are not discontinuous,
they resume, & the music never ends,
the universe never ends, dance of
dreaming forever, never ends, never ends

******

xxvii. Two or Three

What if you were two or three,
meeting me in dreams, teaching me
new singing, are there other kinds
of songs sung lone & in concert both?
I would near you, I would learn,
if there was way, an instruction,
& if you were two or three why not more?

******

xxviii. This Is a Business

Other ways to watch a pine wave
in rainy breeze, or a strange girl
in a long hat smiling down a forgotten
autumn's path. Other ways to work it
than fall stumbling sucker to the guitars
again & again & again. Could see the world
as a feedbag & try to build a thousand
foot high golden tit. All possibilities,
& a thousand others for slinging ass
& making way. But maybe there's only
some years & the sound doors make closing.
Doors closing, & the hunger that *everything matters.*

******

xxix. Medicine for the Past

I cannot stop you from doing that,
or suffering that, or again, or
again in a new way, & how you
are alone tonight & it hurts.
You'll drink hard or years later
you will eat a good high & some
comfort to be found. But I can
say that your pen is still moving
tonight, this poem brother to the one
you are writing like a glowing
motherfucker, to win that one back,
or summon the next, brothers
to you & your poem, & here's our hope
together that other brother poems
will join our praise from many years hence.

******

xxx. Grind

To one day, one night, one hour,
grind this world true, heart open,
my face full in the light, grind it true,
my truth, the world's truth, grinding,
& what might come, & what is coming.

******

To be continued in Cenacle | *71* | *December 2009*

Within's Within: Scenes from the Psychedelic Revolution

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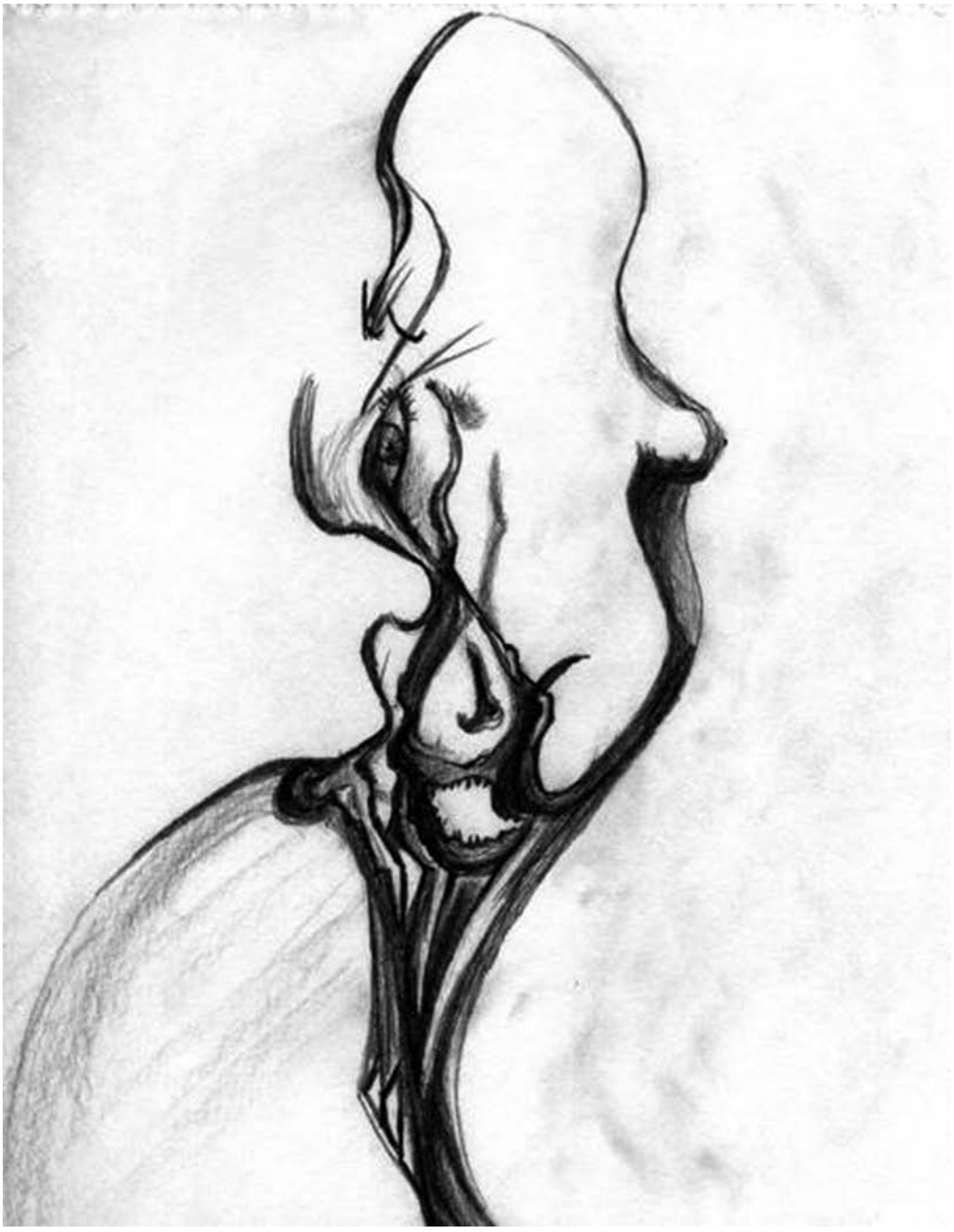


The Pervert

Fetish

Energy Hand White

My Shrink

Christopher Patrick Gose

World's Window: Ruminations Entheonautic and Otherwise, Being an Account of My Travels in the New World

(Continued from *Cenacle* | 69 | June 2009
http://www.scriptorpress.com/cenacle/69.html)

2/23/2009 Cusco, Peru

"This tradition is like a strange bird"
—Dr. Peter Kingsley, on Parmenides, the pre-Socratic "father of reason"

I slept another twelve hours last night, and would have slept more except for a knock on our door early this morning. Our fourth night here—we haven't yet paid and they were just checking to make sure we hadn't skipped town. We finally sent out the package we've been holding onto; postal service is quite straight forward in Peru. Still, they took my passport number, a copy of my passport, as well as a finger print! It was like being inducted into the army; I was waiting for the blood draw.

I have been thinking about Gratefulbear's mother more these days. A woman who approached saintly, she was one of these extraordinary beings so meek in their loving that they become mothers to mankind. In the two years I knew her, I can honestly say that I learned more about love and living than anything I had ever learned from my own only human family, for this was a woman who truly knew the sort of simple and sustaining natural god of George Macdonald. A thin woman, she rarely spoke, and when she did, her soft voice was punctuated by a very gentle Navajo accent. Having been sent to Rehobeth at a young age—the Protestant boarding school in Gallup—, she was very modest and seemingly embarrassed about speaking her native language. Navajo has consistently been described to me as "the most difficult of Native American" languages by native speakers. Her dark skin and round face was more often than not lit up by the most wonderful of smiles. Shortly after retiring from the nursing profession, she fell ill with a gastrointestinal condition that was never properly diagnosed. Somehow I have always felt that she passed along the very substance of her life in caring for others. Alice quite simply accepted me, in spite of her reservations. When my mother and brother were falling to pieces, she welcomed me into her home, cooked for me, and just spent time with me. Her crises of health, which eventually took her life, were long and painful. Surgery after surgery, medication after medication, nothing worked, and it took years before everyone came to terms with the fact that she was dying. I remember coming together with a group of friends, a month and a half before her death, for a mushroom circle—five grams under the tipi.

The mushroom thrust hard and heavy as was expected at this dose. Firmly established in the trance, a clear and lucid sound rang out in the space above me. Clear, and quite loud, a

strange bird appeared to be calling out from the space towards the top of the tipi. As I gazed upwards, I saw the dim outline of a white bird, delicately floating in the space above me and through the haze of the undulating mushroom visions. "Whose bird is this?" I thought to myself, somehow assuming that it belonged to one of the people in the circle. In its mouth was a delicate golden thread, which reached up through the top of the tipi and out.

That same night, locked in epigenetic and alien embrace with one of our company, I saw growing from his neck an immense and branching object. It reached out perhaps two feet from his throat; I touched it, astounded over what I was seeing, then watched it retreat back into his neck. It remains a hallucinatory anomaly for which I have no explanation.

But the bird was an especially touching presence, and I eventually interpreted it to mean that Alice was not much longer for this world. She passed a month and a half later; it was very difficult for everyone.

Three nights before she died—she was in a coma—I dreamt she came and asked me to visit her. The next day I drove out to Gallup. She was peaceful, her room simple with a booklet by her bedside. On the cover of the booklet, the blue and swimming image of the earth. There was a glow about her, and I sat by her side. It was one of those moments that you sink so deeply into, that—in a certain sense—it never ends. There was a sense of presence in that room, a feeling like everything would be OK. I carry that moment within me, always. I didn't want to leave, but the hospital was closing. Reluctantly, I got up, left and was on the road the next morning for Taos. She died two days later, in the early morning.

The nurse told me that Alice became somewhat restless. The nurse sat down next to her, and began singing hymns—they had worked together and the nurse knew that she enjoyed hymns. "It's OK, Alice, you can let go," and two tears fell from Alice's eyes. Through all the pain of her illness, she never once cried; she had been saving those tears. Quietly, she slipped away. Her breathing stopped, and the little bird, our *pajarito*, flew away.

2/27/2009 Cusco, Peru

"The light of the body is the eye:
if therefore thine eye be single,
thy whole body shall be full of light"
—Matthew 6:22

Dear Grandma and Grandpa,

We're doing well, except for the occasional bout of diarrhea. We miss you guys and think of you often. How is Grandma's knee? I imagine she's recovering fine; she has a strong spirit. We made it to Machu Picchu, quite a grueling journey but it was TOTALLY worth it; what an amazing place. I sent you a postcard from Ollantaytambo and have a couple of others from Machu Picchu and Cusco.

We think about you often. Both Gratefulbear and I are infinitely grateful for your presence in our lives, and look forward to many more years caring for you guys. In fact, the both of us agreed that if you ever do move to Phoenix or Palm Springs, we're moving with you to take care of you. Thank you for being family—you perhaps don't know how much it means to me. Also, I know Tom Jr. was giving Grandpa crap for what happened just before we left, but I REALLY, REALLY appreciate that someone finally—after all of the years of bullshit with

Tom Jr. (whom I love dearly)—took a stand for me and the people I love and said "you don't have to put up with that." In all the years dealing with Tom Jr.'s illness/alcoholism—and it has been VERY difficult sometimes—no one has ever had the strength of character to do that for me. You really earned my respect.

Anyhow, I have been thinking a lot about something the two of you mentioned in regards to Tom Jr's alcoholism—"he uses the alcohol because there is some core problem/dilemma that he is trying to hide from," or can't deal with.

So the night we picked up our bags, he asked me in a slurred drunken haze: "maybe you can tell me why everything with my family is falling apart?" At the time I was sort of confounded—how could he not know? It's the drinking, obviously. Since we've been traveling, I've thought about it more and I think you're right: it's not the drinking. It's something underneath. Since I've been in touch with him, several times he has shook his head sadly and said something like, "I really loved your mother, I should have been a better husband. I just lost control."

Then he wasn't invited to the funeral, which was just wrong. I should have stood up for him. I felt like I had no control over the decision, and was in total shock. I never expected to lose her so suddenly. My mother had requested both Gabe and I spread her ashes on the mountain, but Gabe did it without me and I have harbored a lot of resentment. Had my head been on straighter, I would have—and should have—stood up for Tom Jr. and said, "bullshit, they were married for ten years. If anyone should be here, it should be Tom." I should have stood up for Tom Jr., because for all the crap he has put everyone through over the years, Jr. has a good heart and I love him. Because of this complex of feelings about his family falling apart—and what happened to my mother—he unconsciously alienates the people who love him, creating situations where things fall apart.

I tend to have peculiar and very vivid dreams. I don't like to talk about these things—instead heeding what I have been taught: "But you, when you pray, enter into your closet, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father which is in secret; and your Father which sees in secret shall reward you openly." (Matthew 6:6)—but I hope you can perhaps understand the necessity from which I'm writing you.

Over the years, I have had many dreams in which Yeshua/Jesus called the Christos has come to me and delivered teachings and taught me how to pray. In one teaching, He raised his hands to the sky, and there was a white bird that descended, which he placed in the middle of my forehead. This bird, which is the benediction of the Holy Spirit, is always with me. Often, I dream of friends and family who have died—sometimes before I even know they have passed. Several years ago, before I knew that my Uncle Elliott had passed, he came to me in a dream and asked me to write the following poem. Three days later, I was told that he had died a month prior (bear with me here—this is going somewhere):

Crux Mea Stella
by Christopher Patrick Gose

Though this path before me stretches clearly,
and long the winding road that leads me,
each step I make hence follows surely:

Crux Mea Stella—
The Cross is my Star.

And though my shadow surely follows,
an olive tree neath a sleeping hollow,
so too will follow a bright tomorrow:

Crux Mea Stella—
The Cross is my Star.

And though this life shall surely wither,
as an ocean so receives the river,
like a truthfulness endures forever:

Crux Mea Stella—
The Cross is my Star.

For in these two worlds colliding,
the endless joy of calm abiding,
as a dove descends so gently gliding,
and perching henceforth deep inside me:

Crux Mea Stella—
The Cross is my Star.

There were people in my mother's life who were true friends—who meant a great deal to my mother—who weren't at the funeral. People like Tom Jr., Emma, you guys, Gary, Leonilla's family, Gratefulbear's family (even though they didn't know her), several of Tom's friends, Officer Francis, etc.

I have been fasting and praying over the last several days, my heart set on my Lord and Teacher (Rabboni in Aramaic), called Christo. Last night, I dreamt of my mother. We were in the old house and it was completely empty. She said to me: "It wasn't right, the way everyone descended on all of the beautiful things of my life like vultures. Set it right, Christopher. I love you."

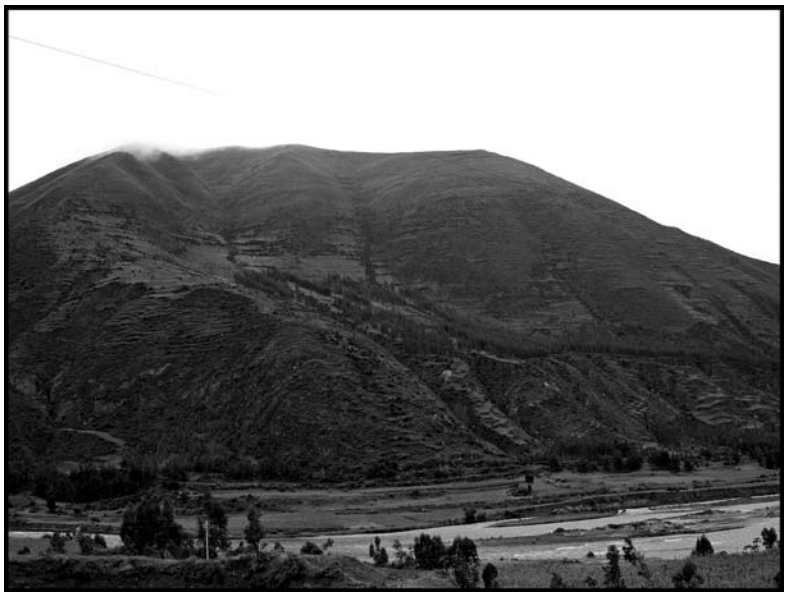
It wasn't the first time I have seen her since she passed, and I know I'll see her again. But it's always wonderful to see her like that. I remember that she loved me and that I loved her. In all honesty, in my weaker moments I wonder. Before she died, there were two songs she would play over and over again: John Lennon's "Imagine," and "I Can Only Imagine" (about the Christos) by Mercy Me. She would play these songs over and over and over.

So I imagine when we get back, we could do a proper memorial for my mother and invite all of the people (ALL of them) who were touched by her. I will put together photo-CDs for everyone; people can make a little something if they like. But what I would most like to do is create a beautiful place—I'm thinking a stone statue I will commission, and perhaps a painting—that can become a place for prayer and reflection.

I wanted to ask if there was any way I could use a small space in your backyard for this.

It would be very tasteful and everything used would be first and foremost approved by the two of you. She just really loved you guys, and loved the view . . . and I don't have anywhere I can go and perhaps it would help Tom with some closure.

There is no pressure here at all, and I absolutely will not be offended if it's not feasible. But I think it could help Tom's alcoholism, and I would be most indebted to you (not that I could be more indebted than I am now).



Cusco to Puno Busride

03/02/2009 Puno, Peru

"The moon does not get wet, nor is the water broken.
Although its light is wide and great, the moon is reflected even in a puddle an inch wide.
The whole moon and the entire sky are reflected in dewdrops on the grass, or even in one drop of water."
—Dogen Zenji

It has been several days since I have made a real entry, having been hit by some sort of malaise. It may be emotional acclimation to the culture shock. As wonderful as travel can be, there is a profound loneliness to it as well. Nothing is familiar, from the subtleties of body language to the quality of the air. We often reach out for company in what is familiar to us.

I didn't have my journal on the bus ride from Cusco yesterday, so penned notes into our guidebook. On the 29th of February, I stayed up all night again instead working on some design issues for the gallery and boutique back home in Albuquerque. As I said, we often reach out for the familiar to wrap our own solitude in those aromas of childhood reverie and dream. Gratefulbear awoke with a headache situated over her left eye, unusual and perhaps suggesting something like a cluster form of headache. I will write her Uncle Tim—the physician—this evening. Perhaps we shall find some Psilocybes along the way for help.

Our bus was perhaps the single most comfortable bus I have ever ridden in—plush seats that reclined with leg support extended out fully. One could easily sleep in these seats—we chose to pay the extra five soles for the luxury seats.

For all the charm of Cusco, I'm glad to be moving on. It reminds me of Santa Fe in a way—there's beauty and a sort of gravity and draw that can become inescapable. The stalls, markets and goods, with everyone trying to sell this or that; you feel like a passing commodity sometimes. At in least some of the parks throughout Cusco moments of solitude and belonging open up.

Today our bus followed the auburn waters of the Rio Vacanota south of Cusco. Barren land, strewn with the withered stalks of grasses well past their bloom. Both Gratefulbear and I have been under a rather heavy malaise; we suspect it may be related to the altitude, or just general culture shock. Another possible candidate in my case would be the intense usage of coca, but that wouldn't explain Gratefulbear's issues. We have taken lodging at a nicer hotel, friendly and beautiful, with hot water. I feel like there is some sort of work I need to do, but there is an obstacle, an obfuscation. I often work, or send email, and then worry over it. What is this person thinking about me? Is this work of any value? The coca seems to work within these patterns of thinking: putting in my best effort, worrying over what everyone is thinking about my effort, obsessing over each and every detail of my work. What I'm beginning to see is that much of this is my previously mentioned mother-imprint trying to maintain itself as a valid construct of my psychology. Now that the pattern is identified, working with it seems to involve another level of challenge with an effort all its own. My first task is to convince myself that THIS time the effort truly will be worth it. As I see it, this becomes a function of re-defining my object libido; I have to somehow re-envision the mother archetype in a way that psychologically sustains the work I do. Evolve a new system of values.

What do I truly value?

I value Gratefulbear, I value my friends, I value when my friends are able to take care of themselves, I value when my friends are happy, I value beautiful things, I value novelty, I value good books, I value business between friends, I value my niece and nephew, I value my sister Genie, I value my brother John, I value autumn on the riverside, I value quiet and rainy days, I value a good night's sleep, I value my Grandma and Grandpa Neill, I value my stepdad, I value dogs, I value cats, I value a good pair of sandles, I value simple clothing, I value Ernest, I value David, I value walks with Gratefulbear, I value Uncle Tim, Aunt Carole, Heather, Jesse, Andrea, Corbin, Candie, I value working long and quiet hours with Tim, I value Robin and Esther, I value the sound of rushing water, I value soulful music, I value losing track of time, I value clear skies and starry nights, I value aspen trees and the turning of the seasons. I most value the simple activity of caring for another person without any thought as to result or compensation, excepting the love of others. I value love . . . I need to be loved.

I remember returning home to my mother's *casita* in Rio Rancho, a place of comfort—perhaps too much comfort—but full of her inimitable and peerless sense of style. The year prior I had lived in a friend's closet off Encinitas Beach, just north of San Diego, working in a vitamin shop and surfing during the evenings. I fell ill and my mother took me in, needing a specific surgery. I think more specifically what I needed was a sense of being loved by my mother. Getting the insurance situated and the money together was a fiasco in itself, and everything was none the easier for my ever-restless heart. After a couple of months and several referrals, I underwent the procedure I had hoped for: a stealth CT procedure for delicate issues of the frontal sinus. In the waiting room before the procedure, my father called on the phone and made some sort of snide comment: "you know he's faking it, I certainly respect you for dealing with him because I sure can't." Resentments I still bear.

"It has been a pleasure," Mom retorted.

On the way home—in my anesthetized haze—I remember that Mom broke down into surging waves of spontaneous tears, her body shaking wildly. "I'm sorry, I'm so sorry, I love you so much," she sobbed over and over again.

The last time I saw my mother was Valentine's Day 2003. Gratefulbear and I visited her with a great stuffed bear and flowers. My mother was so ashamed of her obesity at the time that she wouldn't let Gratefulbear in to see her. Gratefulbear never met her, and she died the next year of a cardiomyopathy, the result of her obesity. For years, I found myself irrationally distraught on Valentine's Day, eventually making the connection. In fact, more than once, I forgot Valentine's Day altogether, to Gratefulbear's dismay. Then in 2007, I really went all out: roses, bath salts, home-made dinner, candles, everything. We were living in the mountains at the time, and as I came up our dirt driveway I noticed the lights were all off. Sighing and sad that I had seemingly ruined another Valentine's Day, and come home too late, I gathered the flowers, the eggs and tortilla for the meal, the card, and sullenly made my way to the house.

As I was walking, I became aware of the light of the moon; it was just shy of full, perhaps 50 degrees off the eastern horizon, and casting a muted orange tone over the *piñon* and grass field in front of our house. Walking beneath the light of the moon—in that moment—was a miracle. For years, I had always been sad about my mother, with few positive thoughts and memories; everything seemed painful and unhappy. She had spiraled into addictions of various forms, and then alienated herself from me out of the shame she felt for her condition. Then she was gone; so suddenly, I wasn't prepared.

But here in the light of the moon, I felt my mother's presence. It was like those tears, not something that made sense but something that was full of Spirit. I remembered how wonderful my mother was, as I stood alone under the moonlight. I remembered that I valued and loved my mother, deeply. No one knows where these things come from—it was irrational and spontaneous—but it comes from a place deep within us all. Raw, emotional and slain by the Spirit.

To this day I remain baffled by the power that came through these moments; it said something of the deepest rhythms of the heart and soul, something only understood with heart and soul. My mother, for all her misgivings, truly was a beautiful soul; she knew the heart, and lived the sort of life that was perfect for her, in this world. Sometimes I feel her near, with all her quirks and misgivings, and realize I love them too. I imagine a beautiful white bird with a tether in its mouth, gently ringing the angel's bell: "on earth as it is in heaven." I'll say it again, because it means something to me: I valued and loved my mother, deeply.

Tomorrow we hope to be well and rested enough to explore the city of Puno and see Lake Titicaca itself. Until then, rest and music.

03/04/2009 Puno, Peru

"Imagine the time the particle you are returns where it came from, the family darling comes home.
Wine, without being contained in cups, is handed around.
A red glint appears in a granite outcrop and suddenly the whole cliff turns to ruby."
—J'allaludin Rumi

Awoke this morning after a restless night of unsettling dreams, many with a sexual charge. In one dream, I'm copulating with a black woman who—at orgasm—disintegrates into

a skeleton. I seem to be dealing with more gastro-intestinal discomfort. I went a bit overboard with "comfort foods" last night. I decided to just sap it with some Ciprofloxacin, and it seems to be working quite well. My flurry of creative energy and effort from the other night has me once again feeling these similar emotional patterns: is this effort worth anything? does anyone value this work? I don't check my email, because there's always running that risk of bearing your soul and having it trampled on. Certainly this constellation of emotions is based on a specific set of experiences.

On September 11th, 2001, I was fasting in Chiang Mai, Northern Thailand. I had been struggling with a peculiar pressure in my forehead that had become quite uncomfortable—the very same pressure that led me back to New Mexico for surgery years later. I remember walking in the walled Old City in Chiang Mai when I saw the first images of the towers falling in New York. My initial reaction was one of denial—"oh, it's some Thai tabloid making a joke"—but, as the day unfolded, I eventually saw the video footage.

My travels had exposed me to Muslim groups. On a 48-hour train ride from Calcutta to Trivandrum in the Kerala district, a group of perhaps five Muslim men had taken it upon themselves to protect me from passing strangers. A stranger would approach and one of the Muslim men would stand up sternly and warn them off with a wave of his hand. In the Sufi tradition, "the guest," and the subtleties between host and guest, represent the relationship between humanity and god—a mystical concept in the sense that it extends from the necessities of human custom, an essentially humane attitude. During the ride, they taught me the fundamental tenants of Islam, asking me if American Muslims prayed five times daily, as Muslims in the East do.

"I don't know many American Muslims," I responded.

This exposure inculcated a great deal of sympathy and respect for the tradition of Islam and, since my UCLA days, I had taken Rumi as my own patron heart-poet: Uncle Rumi. So when 9/11 happened, and the war drums started beating, I had doubts. Furthermore, my traveling companion had exposed me to the whole domain of conspiracy theory and the politics of revolution, especially pertaining to the Bush-Reagan "dynasty." I took to many of the ideas with great fervor, having studied Gandhi and the Transcendentalists in high school. I fancied myself a "pacifist" having not yet realized that true pacifism and *ahimsa* is first and foremost the process of taming one's own inner violence.

With this background, I wrote an email shortly after 9/11 critical of U.S. policy in the Middle East, quoting extensively a brilliant article written by cognitive revolutionary and political commentator Noam Chomsky. Little did I know that a single email would entirely transform my life. I knew the email would challenge certain of the concepts held by my paternal family, but was not prepared for the focused barrage of enmity directed at me in the days that followed. I was wounded to the core, having put a great deal of heart, soul, and research into my email, with the hope of engaging in rational and mature discussion with my father especially. Instead, I was pummeled with a series of *ad hominem* character attacks, criticizing me for not paying taxes, not having a job, "wandering." These felt like attacks on my very heart and soul. To this day, my father and I are alienated. A greater portion of the doubt I have regarding my creative efforts, and deep sensitivity regarding how people respond to statements I make, can be traced to this profoundly deep wounding that has walked with me through my twenties.

I tried, but ultimately found that I could not satisfy both my father's expectations of me and be true to my higher Self—"to thine own self be true."

It has been perhaps the single most perplexing enigma of my life story that I was born into a family whereby listening to my heart I have had to leave home and kin behind. I joined the Army with the hopes of reconciling with my father, have made several efforts to talk it out, but it has ultimately been an impossible enigma. In our lives each of us has a "tough nut" that we work on, what the alchemists call the *prima materia*, the "black earth." In the first operation, the *prima materia* undergoes the *divisio*, which discerns the *prima materia* as comprising distinct and impossibly irreconcilable elements. So it has appeared with my relationship with my father, an impossible and entirely confounding situation without any sense of possible reconciliation.

In retrospect, I would have done a lot of things differently—it's often that way—but, at the time, I simply could not have anticipated my father's reaction. Nothing suggested to me that my ideas would be so fundamentally threatening to his worldview; I'm still learning from this painful aspect of my life. For long periods, I struggled with daily anger and deep resentment, waking every morning angry at my father. I still struggle, much like Jacob becoming Israel, but will not relent until I see the truth "face to face."

After having emerged in one piece that fateful night—years ago—in which I had gazed into the flaming eyes of the High Priest while on Dipropyltyptamine (DPT), we pressed on deeper into the chasms of hyperspace. Next on the menu, DPT+Ketamine in combination. Ramping up slowly, toggling between each of the medicines in search of that fine line: 30mg Ketamine, followed 15 minutes later by 30mg DPT. The disassociation of the Ketamine synergized, slowed down, and then amplified the somatic-psychedelic vibration of the DPT. We pressed the dose, 40mg Ketamine followed by 40mg DPT, and something was opening. Three in the circle, each speaking in tandem, I began to relax deeply into the vibration of the language. As the warmth and relaxation expanded, the pressure in my forehead between my eyes returned, and I relaxed into it. I requested a final shot, and always grin with crazy affection at the memory of my good friend sinking the plunger: "that's 50mg Dipropyltryptamine and . . . " sinking, buzzing, slow and suffuse: "75mg Ketamine Hydrochlooooooorrrrriiiiiiide,"—and the entirety of this physical reality, my whole life and everyone I ever knew, everything I ever did, collapsed through the point in my forehead and once again I found myself in the Other World.

There was a circle of beings of light above me, spinning overhead in a spiral. I looked at my companions, who were still visible in the circle around me. Each of us spoke in tandem. As we spoke, I saw that from this angelic spiral above me was sent this ray of light—it was circling through us like a great cosmic lasso. It moved through each of us in a circle, and while, on the one hand, it was like a single ray of light, it also illuminated the entirety of the circle. As the ray passed through our individual bodies at the throat level, our physical bodies would utter the visible and tangible topography of the illumined circle: visible language. I could quite literally see what was going to be said by the next person in the circle before anything was even said.

Above me, and visible through the spiritual eye in the center of my forehead, a great spiral spun outwards into infinite space. In this spiral, I saw the entirety of my biological heritage, what seemed to be the spiritual bodies of ancestors, my father, mother, as well as friends and family who had been central in my life. In a paradox of motion, as I collapsed within this point of spiritual vision, the spiral opened outwards in layers like an onion. The medium of vision and perception was like a tightly focused laser of high intensity. The spiral

itself was comprised of a Being—akin to the Christos—whose hands were palms outstretched and facing downwards just over the top of my skull:

"this is how one truly prays"

—and the light ray circled within my body, peeling away layers and showing them to me in full physical detail:

"this is the epidural system"—then peeling back the layer, it became transparent—

"lympathic system"—peeling system back, then transparent—

"muscular system"—peeling back, gone—

"visceral system—peel, gone—

"respiratory system—gone—

"cardiovascular system"—

"skeletal system"—

"peripheral nervous system"

—then the "central nervous system," and I was looking at was the entirety of my physical form transparent to this light excepting the juncture between my eyes where my ocular nerves crossed, an ultra-dense point of brilliant light. There was a great POP, like a gushing fountain, and my consciousness instantaneously leaped from itself. Ineffable, my consciousness was completely without form, but was diamond-like: a radiant star. Within the wholeness of this light, I was also a particle that traversed within the diamond from point to point. Simultaneously, I was the entire star, each point in the diamond reflected at each and every point within it:

"The lamp of the body is the eye.
If therefore thine eye be single,
thy whole body shall be full of light"
—Matthew 6:22

I was completely disembodied and, according to my companions, repeating three words *ad infinitum*: "Bliss, Enlightenment, Nirvana." Subsequently, I forgot the entire experience until a month later when the memory spontaneously re-surfaced; not the only time I have had this selective psychedelic-amnesia. I remember coming down, the sense of having been abandoned on this very dense plane, utterly doomed, parched of the thirst-quenching substance of salvation. For some unknown reason, I was sent back.

Over the years I have interpreted this experience in many ways: the benediction and blessing of the Holy Spirit; alien abduction with implantation at the eye-brow (explaining

subsequent sinus issues); third eye awakening; the gifting of spiritual wings. Inevitably, one comes to view these experiences as occurring over many worlds, mercurial across many conceptual frameworks. Ultimately, I see this class of experience as being what the Sufis call *Baraka*, the "Blessing." There's a sense that—in the end—everything will be fine.

I seem to be going through a period of great personal crisis. The strain of nearly constant physical discomfort coupled with this momentum that has brought me so far from home—I get homesick sometimes. Awkward, considering I don't really have a home per se. I know this will make me stronger, but it has not been easy. I look with faithful eyes towards the setting sun.

In my life, travel has served as some manner of healing function. Gratefulbear and I experience certain places in a specifically personified and embodied form, including San Francisco. After my mother died, I frequently made the drive to San Francisco; driving became a sort of meditation, and I would drive for hours on end. I was ending a personal crisis similar to what I seem to be going through now. I spent some time with my traveling companion from our days in India, but I don't think he quite understood where I was in my life. During this time, I developed a taste for both cannabis and red wine, indulging in both often. I found the parks particularly comforting; much of San Francisco's spirit has always seemed to me to have something to do with its orientation around Golden Gate Park.

I had picked up a copy of Joan Parisi Wilcox's *The Visionary and Healing Powers of the Vine of the Soul*, covering a sort of limited but very interesting personal exposure to the huasca-complex. With the stress and remorse of loss, my mind strained, I empathized with Wilcox's struggles. As the sun began to set, I remember reading a particularly moving passage in which she gives a Jungian interpretation to one of her ayahuasca visions. She describes rising up above the planet and seeing immense and moaning red vents, releasing mists of grief into space, terming it the "woundedness of womanhood." As I was reading, the veil softened, became transparent gossamer, and then was gone: Glistening scales—slick with sheen—an undulating form emerges, soft then sharp and well-defined. "This is the land of the dead," I hear, and the glistening form reaches upwards, rhythmic and alluring. A soft and effervescent silver light surrounds the length of its serpentine body leading up to its head. With the head, the entire framework shifts and everything becomes planar, like peeking one's head up above water. About the head is a pliant and illumined golden glow, like a hazy sunset. Peering through the haze, the plane becomes clear and defined. The head is spread out like a great arch that eclipses the entire body, a sort of infinite circle without circumference. At its crown, I see my mother's face, calm, serene, and decorated with a simple and poised smile. I see her several times later. Nothing is said, just silence and seeing; there are a host of shadows around her, and something about the scene seemed dramatic and posed, like an opera. The vision faded, and I went for a long walk in the park, confounded by what I had seen.

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3/5/2009 Puno, Peru

"Everything's gonna be alright now,
everything's gonna be alright . . ."
—Bob Marley

Yesterday's dose of Ciprofloxacin really threw me for a loop, the most pronounced experience of its side-effect profile I've ever experienced. Loopy, while simultaneously fatigued and restless, it took me a couple hours to connect it with the dose of Ciprofloxacin. I had to bring out the big guns and listen to some Bob Marley; brother has soul and brought me right out of it. Things were feeling pretty ominous, it was hitting me hard, comes through some of the writing from yesterday. Funny thing is, I can't stand reggae! But you gotta love Bob Marley; kinda like the Beatles, just gotta love that soul.

Thomas Merton wrote that the spiritual life was an act of brotherhood—being a monk, he was writing specifically from his condition, and perhaps "filialhood" is more generally appropriate, but Merton used the word *brother*. I miss my brother, we were such good friends—I just miss him. All the pain of the recent years somehow eclipsed those years where we anchored each other to a sense of family and belonging. Another impossible situation, one of my own living koans.

I slept well after that night when my mother came to me on the head of an immense snake. That next morning, I meandered about Golden Gate Park and the Haight district of the city. Towards the afternoon, I listened to music and took it easy. When dusk hit and the sun was setting, I was sitting in my room when a second and more unsettling vision unfolded.

Again a lifting veil, web-like and gossamer. A place like a basement, lusterless shadows and scurrying darkness in every corner. Filled with despair and loneliness, the webs and shadows lift ever so slightly and there's a woman in this place. Wearing a thin white night-robe, this woman was desperately in search of some lost treasure. Becoming clearer, I sense my mother. She often suffered from insomnia, and could be heard rustling about the house late into the night. Often I'd hear her start a load of laundry at 3 a.m., or doing dishes into the early hours of the morning. In this place, she was in urgent search of something lost, seizing about the room in a fit. As I brought more attention and focus to bear on her presence, she slowed and gravitated towards me. Looking into her face, I saw what it was she had lost. In her constant searching, her fitful and restless wandering, she had lost her face.

Instead of a face, she had a torrential and vacant whirlwind. I peered deeply into this void and within her face was an unfolding scene; behind her restless seeking was a pure and cold animal body, rippling with taut and fierce musculature. It looked like a bull and was the pure substance of desire, craving, unquenchable thirst, prodding her on constantly in search for the very thing she would find if she stopped looking. She slowed, and the simple act of my seeing into her void brought some peace to her. Even without eyes, we saw one another.

03/06/2008 Puno, Peru

"We have no idea what we are"
—J'allaludin Rumi

An interesting development regarding the coca. Up until two nights ago, I have chewed

daily with no discernable problem. Then I started chewing and seemed to suffer an allergic response. Starting as an itch in the scalp, I then developed a hive-like rash on my neck and forearms, and my eyelids became slightly swollen. The reaction began as I was relating the vision of my mother's facelessness and the bull. I took a couple days off, bought some loratadine and tried coca again today. After twenty minutes of chewing, the rash developed again. I took the loratadine, which allayed the symptoms within an hour or so.

This could be something specific to the coca in this particular area, it could be an authentic sensitivity to coca itself. The coca seems to have served a specific function in putting me in touch with the mother archetype; it may be that my physical body is shifting into a mode whereby it is preparing for the ayahuasca. Though I've never taken ayahuasca, I have experienced unusual phenomena surrounding the ayahuasca-complex; phenomena that appear—in some way—to be atemporal and connected to some future encounter of the plant.

Several weeks before we made the decision to travel, I dreamt that the ayahuasca spirit came to me as a soft and golden light. "It's time to walk this medicine path," it said. It was peculiar and subtle, but the message was very clear. Today, after experimenting again with the coca, my shift seems to have quite clearly shifted to the ayahuasca, and my sense of it is far more obtuse and veiled. I have no idea what will happen, but have a sense it will be amongst that rare class of experiences described as "peak."

In the hopes of bringing some closure to the maternal vision cycle aforementioned in this journal, the last time I experienced my mother on the visionary plane was under the influence of a full dose of DMT (Dimethyltryptamine). Over the years, my experience of DMT has been particularly unusual. Initially, it was the classic experience of the elf-ridden DMT-plex, a theatre of the bizarre. At a certain point, DMT began opening up a space that was a profound and void stillness, deeply satisfying but indescribable; in a sense, there was no real content to the experience, simply a sense of now-ness.

Under the influence of DMT, this void and still nowness unfolded and I was floating above the surface of the planet. My mother was there, as a presence that surrounded me. I felt as though I had tapped into an immense cosmic database of information. She told me several stories across her life: childhood neglect, pubescent sexual abuse, people she had affairs with. There was something profoundly liberating about these stories, something that allowed me to understand and let her go. "It's time for you to go," she said and there's a whoosh and a sucking gravity pulling me rapidly down, submerging me farther, farther, and an upward gush. I smell the ocean, sense wind in my hair, and feel an immense sense of freedom. I am riding the back of a whale, my totem; the DMT "elves" have become dolphins swimming, splashing, and playing at my side. The vision fades, and I come out of the trance to the sound of the soft patter of rain.

Something is happening here, something of an unusual nature. That indescribable and void stillness appears to be suffusing my soul, and there is a sense of ineffable but dense pull and direction. The compass is set. It's time to sail.

03/08/2009 Puno, Peru

We just returned from two days and one night on Lake Titicaca. A threshold has been passed in this journey: physically, emotionally and spiritually. Our boat, a shallow skiff with outboard motor, chugged along slowly; within an hour, we stepped off at one of the several

Uros Floating Islands

floating islands at Uros. The tradition of floating communities began during Inca times, when pre-Incan groups along the lake at Titicaca took to the waters as shelter against the dominant and invading Inca. Initially living only in boats, the inhabitants of the floating islands shifted to floating islands made of reed and large chunks of floating peat moss, all roped together. We sat, sang, purchased some crafts and moved on to the island at Amantani.

Described as a living relic of Incan culture, the community at Amantani is cradled by two peaks, each boasting temples respectively devoted to the masculine and feminine principles. Terraced with modern agricultural stonework, the land is discretely divided up into family parcels. The families—women dressed in traditional clothing—met us at the dock, accompanying us to our respective homes for the night. In the afternoon we ascended to our highest elevation so far this trip: 4200 meters at the Pachamama temple.

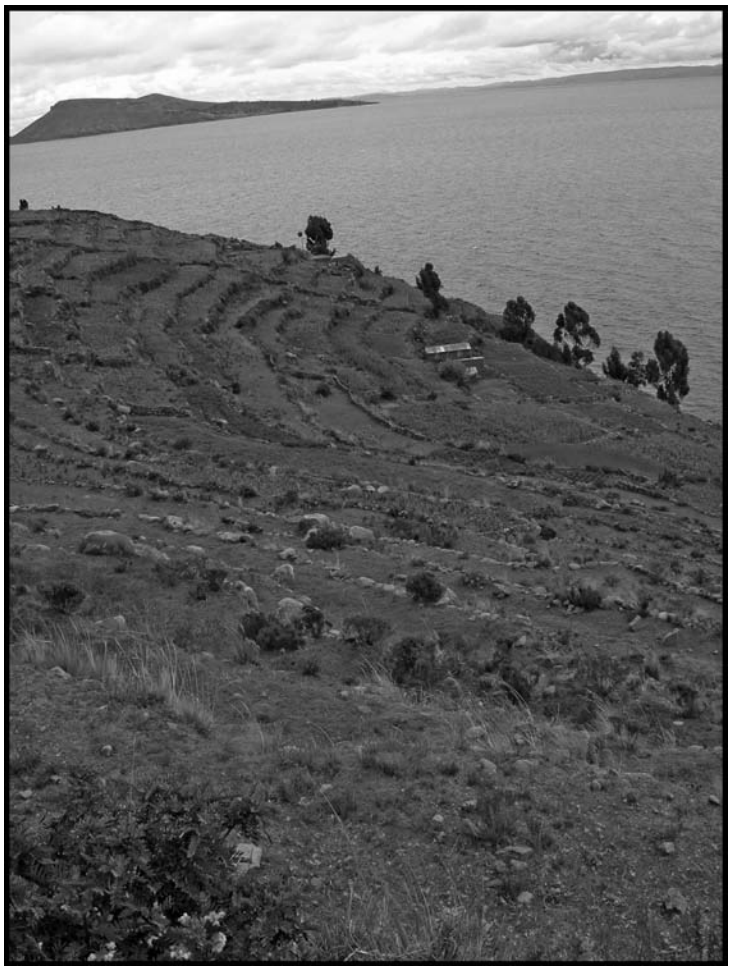
At night, we danced with our families and the community. For the first time, I felt that perhaps tourism wasn't such a bad thing, but could be a medium of education and cross-cultural understanding. I slept lightly, and we woke early; apparently Gratefulbear's clock was an hour fast. I dreamt that I was Che Guevara, training in an underground complex; it was painful.

The boat ride between Amantani and Taquille was rough, the waters tossing the boat around for the entire hour and a half. Gratefulbear suffered from a bit of sea-sickness, while our Japanese traveling companion experienced full-on puking. At Taquille we walked an hour up to the main community, admiring what surely were the finest textiles we have witnessed in

Peru. I purchased a vest. We ate lunch on the far side of the island and made our way back to Puno in the afternoon. A wonderful experience. Tomorrow we're heading back to Cusco in the hopes of finding the ring and catching a flight to Iquitos.

Emotionally and psychologically, the last week or so has largely focused on my father, which is perhaps why I haven't written much. I get very angry and can't imagine writing down these feelings and thoughts, but I can't let them build up. They become dangerous. When I get angry, I need to do something with that energy to prevent it from being so destructive.

This afternoon, I seem to have softened about my father; we're getting too old for all of this. I felt some compassion for him; he's getting old and must be realizing it. I hope he softens, I pray he softens. All I need is a sliver of light from him and everything is forgiven, the thinnest sliver of opening. My brother, I think he just needs to be on his own, and I should have recognized that when I visited him over the summer. I was very needy and had some idea he was all right in himself. In fact, I was looking for guidance from my younger brother when it's really my place to be the guide. I hope healing is still possible, I believe it still is. Healing would be a real miracle in this life—it must be possible somehow. God could not have intended this to go on forever. So I'll pray for it over the next couple of months. I have a lot of regrets about all of this; a lot of my creative energy seems wrapped up in this regret and shame. On the one hand, I have this powerful reservoir of creative energy; on the other hand, there's a deep fear of what it actually is. Am I crazy? Is this all empty bullshit? There are so many obstacles, but I have only ever needed a sliver of loving kindness from my father; it would heal my entire world. I feel like I have tried everything, and now anything would be a profound grace, and profound grace seems to be the only real possibility here.



Taquille

A lot of it is seeing how indigenous communities and families function; there's a glue of joy and simplicity that holds people together. The sound of the ocean, simple activities—these people have the most extraordinary smiles. I feel like my family lost this, our faces have been a lockjaw of unhappiness. I see a lot of unhappiness in myself; it's hard for me to smile. But the truth is, I am connected to my family and I can't change that. There's deep pain in this

place: the pain of separation. It's strange, having been so right about the politics, the violence, the problems with this country, yet simultaneously, so emotionally wrong. This is where true strength is born, and I will have to transmute my past somehow; how, I have no idea.

I returned to the coca, the side effects have cleared up, and I seem to be more attenuated in my chewing. I have no idea how to explain the shift, but I tried chewing earlier this evening and was completely rash-free. It may have been the specific coca I was buying, from one woman. Tonight, part of me is lonely; part of me is at home in the loneliness. On the edge of unseen beauty, you only have your vision. Seeing, being: a vision naked in its own sight and standing alone before it.

Glancing back through all of this writing, I have yet to find that common thread with which to weave this story with simplicity and grace; there are pieces missing. I need to start remembering my father and, through that remembering, building a sense of my own manhood. I need to hem in the rhetoric and mythopoetics, and tell the simple part of the story. When did it go wrong? Where did it go wrong? Why did it go wrong? When was it right?

I'm not sure what it is that I'm looking for really; sometimes I have no idea why we're here. I know at a certain point, Gratefulbear felt it was too much for us. A void sense fills my heart. On the one hand, there's so much about the trajectory of this journey that I cannot know, yet there's an urgency, to "get there." I do think it's good to keep active so as not to languish; but perhaps I'm simply running from something. I wish I was solid with my family, but the family instability must serve some function. I'm tired of being disliked by so many people; I wish I could just set it right with everyone and go about my life. As callous as I often pretend to be, I worry a great deal about what other people think about me. Still, I'm glad I have taken a sort of stand against the whole thread of militarism in my family. I guess my father felt like a failure for not going the military route; I certainly made a mistake in joining the Army.

I think one of the difficulties I have struggled with in my father's general sense of personal ethic is that—in his eyes—it has never been OK for me to feel good about myself. Over the years, the extremes of negativity just got to me. He so desperately needed me to have something wrong, and I so desperately needed to be right in his eyes. In essence, between us we have needed a problem. Why?

If I can say there was a clear source to when my father's attitude towards me started changing, I would have to say it was when I became involved with the opposite sex. I don't think he could possibly understand the deep sense of need that my relationships with women were serving at the time; I should have talked with him more about what was going on emotionally, but it has always been difficult talking with him about emotions. I just never really had a loving female presence in my life. My mother's presence was sporadic, though she did love me. My father seems to have some sort of deep-seated issue with a man's need for a woman. In my life, I have needed female companionship.

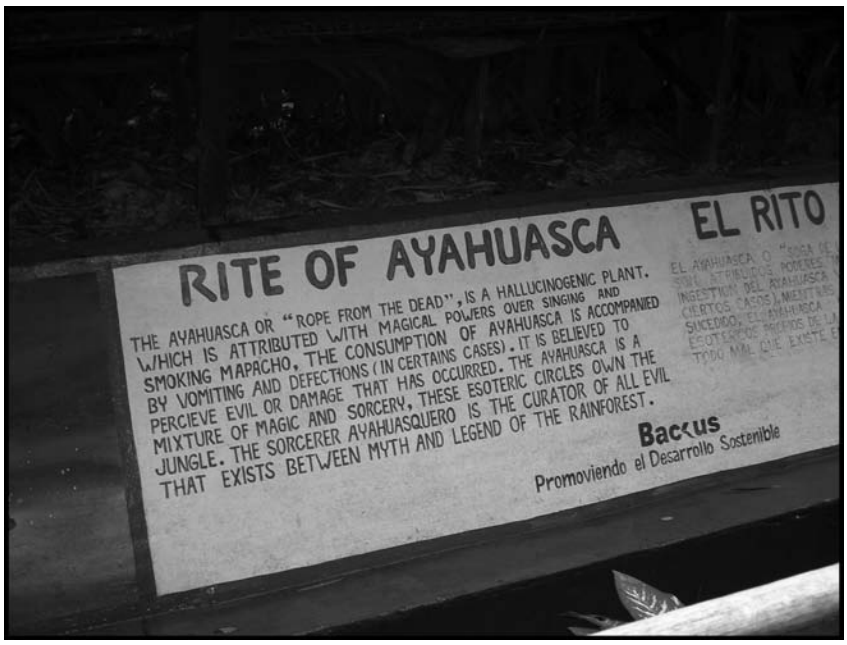
There are people who do love me for who I am.

03/11/2009 Iquitos, Peru

From a very young age, the vibration of the jungle has captured my spiritual imagination—what Henry Corbin calls the *Mundus Imaginalis* or imaginal world—in a way that has quelled any and all doubts in my mind as to the compelling reality of the process that was initiated in me almost ten years ago now. In fact, our culture—with its compulsive fixation

on disparate bits of externally verified datum—is knotwork, quickly passed over, in a vast and flowing tapestry of infinitely greater depth and substance. All of the doubting and critical voices, twisted bits of string so enamored of their own peculiar twistedness as to refuse the very fabric of which they are interminably bound.

In the Siona mythologem, the verb *suna* is used to describe the actions of ayahuasca upon the human mind and sensorium. Translated roughly as "shine," suna denotes the second in the bi-phasic action of the "vine of the dead." The first phase—designated by the verb *dwege*—is to be drunk, dizzy; an altered state devoid of meaning in the fashion of so many "psychedelic enthusiasts." "To shine," however, is the revelation of all of the realms of the universe within the fulcrum of constant transformation, rhythm, meaning, and design. Here in the jungle, I feel myself shining; often, there is a sense of electrostatic swell within my heart, stretching out beyond the physical plane like an immense vibronic and luminescent green blanket. A veritable forest of visions humming with the dense and rich music of souls taken to flight, or ashine on the branches of the one great tree that is itself all direction and life—wings outstretched and then gone from the branches.



Quistakocha Zoo Bench

This last month of challenge and travel has fortified my constitution and, while everything feels foreign and strange, there is a sense of personal renewal, as if my own world has been created anew. Our travel yesterday included the long ride from our hotel in Puno to the airport at Juliaca, and then flights to Lima connecting on to Iquitos. Landing in Iquitos, itself a bead along the vast and meandering serpent that is the Rio Amazonas, our plane settled amidst a pillow of cloud and wind. The rain is a constant companion of the diversity in which the rainforest itself is embedded. We emerged from the cool comfort of the plane into a humidity both hot and hectic. Yet for both Gratefulbear and me, the sense of *pleroma*, embodied by this bedrock of organic, earthbound existence, has given the wind beneath our feet wings upon which to fly.

We quickly proceeded to the Belen market described as "filthy but real" by the owner of the "Yellow Rose of Texas," where we seem to take most of our meals. Last night I dreamt of the ayahuasca spirit, and the message was simple: allow it to open, allow the experience to come to you. The series of coincidences today, linking and threading me into what is the single most ubiquitous plant psychointegrator complex on the planet, astounds me. This afternoon, sensing the ayahuasca approach as evasive, I sat down at a computer, connect online. A woman

logged in for the first time at a chat channel I frequent back home in the States, and said: "I have apprenticed with an ayahuasquero here in Iquitos for a year and a half; if anyone needs help navigating (yes, she used the word navigate), be in touch."

Synchronous phenomenon in attendance of the Mystery; we discovered that we weren't five minutes' walk from one another. We will be meeting for dinner this evening, and take it from there, but this momentum is undeniable and I feel very strong. Leaving behind a world of dense and fruitless associations and entanglements has without doubt been the smartest thing I have done in years and years. My life and its purpose are with me, and I alone with my life, but alive!! Alive!!!

03/13/2009 Iquitos, Peru

The clouds cleared today, leaving us quite exposed along the banks of the Rio Amazonas. I have begun acclimating to the infamous *mapacho* tobacco, the *Nicotiana rustica* of the jungle. Thick and of an altogether different class of psychoactivity than its commercial cousin *N. tabacum,* it has been a challenge to get used to the thick, dark, potent smoke. A universal companion of ayahuasca, the tobacco is used for cleansing and in ritual. However, I didn't want to just dive into two wholly novel psychoactives at one time, so we bought a little and have been sampling it.

Yesterday we journeyed a couple hours down the Rio Amazonas to the Rio Nanaya, a tributary that winds its way along the southern bank of Iquitos. Having not planned to be out, we forgot our sunscreen, long sleeves, and hat; so both Gratefulbear and I ended up with sunburns. Last night we met a very interesting man from London, here as a volunteer in the field of environmental technology. On Sunday he invited us to attend a *futbol* game with him and his taxi driver. Some time in the near future, we hope to charter a boat up the Amazon to see its headwaters.

We decided against visiting the zoo today, instead opting to rest and eat. Our companion from Australia—Garth—left earlier today, wide-eyed and enthusiastic to return and continue working with the medicine. I hope he makes it back soon. I am awaiting Meghan's reply to my email . . .

03/15/2009 Iquitos, Peru

Today we attended a *futbol* game at the main stadium in Iquitos, a fairly civilized affair except for the difficulties in obtaining water. Our companion from London—Nick—is quite a find in terms of familiarity with local Iquitos and his willingness to help us in exploring the local scenery. As adventurous as Nick is, you'd figure he would be a bit more jaded, but he is always up for something new. The heat and sun was nearly unbearable, beating down on us just past halftime and leaving us soaked in sweat. But we have figured out how to deal with the sun, by wearing long sleeves and using strong sun block. Though expected to win, the home team was a disappointment. We ate tasty Ceviche and spent the afternoon staying out of the sun.

Yesterday we visited the Quistococha Zoo, an up close and personal look at the jungle fauna. The jaguar especially struck me, powerful and muscular as it paced in a circle about the cage. The pumas masticating in ecstatic feline joy, immersed in bloody, raw carniverous splendors. Both Gratefulbear and I stroked the belly of a Waidurin, a pink Amazonian river

dolphin. Afterwards, we fished for our lunch up the road, all under the lead of our local guide, Roy. His English is good enough to teach me a fair amount of Spanish.

We spent another afternoon avoiding the sun. Tomorrow we are supposed to go see the famed butterfly farm, though it's closed—so perhaps we'll go see the snakes.

03/18/2009 Iquitos, Peru

"Tomorrow is gone—
where do the voices come from"
—Porcupine Tree

Yesterday we traveled by taxi up the lone *carretera* and across the Rio Nanay to the jungle town at Nauta, catching a grass-roofed river taxi down the Rio Ucuyali to the headwaters of the Rio Amazonas. From the *mirador*—watchtower—the muddy waters of the Rio Maranon merged in one fluid continuity with the dark waters of the Rio Ucuyali to form the one great river Amazon, teeming with water and life all the way through Brazil to the Atlantic. From the watchtower, my mind slowed and rested in memories of moments long ago; the great and blue image of Planet Earth that graced the side of my mother-in-law's deathbed; the one great Light that is Spirit; a quiet nap in the evening. "Such moments remain with us always," I thought to myself, and resolved to sit with this one until it faded across the temporal twilight that is all passing phenomenon including our own lives.

Nauta

The bright and smiling faces of river children, splashing in the languid waters along the shore, echoed as if in a dream and, sweeping across the flat plane of the jungle came a great and showering blanket of rain, a welcome respite from the radiant heat of the equatorial sun. For lunch we ate fish, which is nearly impossible to avoid in the jungle, and fried plantain like sweet potatoes, "Time has no meaning out here, except for the two times: sun up and sun down," the proprietor at the local gringo hangout reminded us today.

From the *mirador*, we continued up the far shores of the Rio Maranon to a point just beyond the headwaters, where the flow temporarily slows before merging into whirling and unruly currents. Jumping into the cold water, the pink river dolphins gathered around us, emerging momentarily to exhale in spurts of foaming mist. A day well spent, except perhaps for the taxi ride home, like a flying metal death-trap on wheels. Today we relaxed and tomorrow we will go see the butterfly farm.

03/19/2009 Iquitos, Peru

"Where is my Spirit—
I'm nowhere near it."
—Stevie Wonder

The night prior to connecting with Meghan, Gratefulbear dreamt she was with a female Spirit and talking about her mother. "It has been so long and I am still mourning my mother," she tells the Spirit. "For healing you will go here," and the Spirit takes her to a small village. In the village there are two large and white statues of hands; the hands are moving about in some form of communication. It just dawned on me that Meghan speaks sign language, another bead on the thread of synchronicities that have drawn us here.

Last night I dreamt again of the ayahuasca spirit. A group had gathered in an open-air space beneath a wooden *casita* propped up on stilts, with one side opened out onto a sort of lagoon or lake. We partook of the brew and sat in anticipation of the oncoming surge. I felt myself being pulled up on a sort of tether, floating up and above the casita and being almost sucked into the vast and empty sky. Then a complete shift in consciousness and I suddenly find myself completely removed from the domain of the physical and sensory. Everything is dark, but my consciousness is illumined within the darkness without any sense of physical body—all senses in complete suspension. The darkness is like a large and warm velvet blanket, welcoming and spacious, and has become the object of a light that is beyond light/darkness. At some point I return to the physical form and Gratefulbear has been having some sort of difficulty. "Where did you go?" she asks, but I have no answer to her question. "Nowhere really, but while my body was here I was elsewhere," is all I can think to say.

Nauta Watchtower

The sense of illuminated darkness was striking and somehow absolute, touching something ineffable and removed from the narrow chinks of the sensory and bodily. Not void, nor nihilistic in any sense, but empty of any discernable singularity or substance. Not even truly "dark," but light of an altogether different variety. Many of my recent dreams have dealt in the ayahuasca theme, though I have not recorded the majority of them. This one was quite striking. I have no interpretation.

03/20/2009 Iquitos, Peru

The young man who has been occasionally acting as our guide accompanied us to the Mariposaria—butterfly farm—up the Rio Nanay. Looked over by a well-informed and passionate Austrian woman, we were walked through the various stages of the life-process of the different butterflies from egg to pupa to caterpillar to winged butterfly. Stepping off our boat, we were immediately mobbed by capuchin monkeys, and warned to protect our belongings from them. They have a reputation for pick-pocketing.

Butterfly Farm

Such a strange way to live, tending butterflies for the simple sake of doing so—for butterflies have no real economic value so far as the butterfly farm goes. I find the devotion to beauty for its own sake most appealing, though she offers a sort of service like a zoo. The sheer impracticality impresses me.

Afterwards we boated across the Nanay to the serpent farm on the other side, a somewhat drab place where they clearly don't take optimal care of the animals. Honestly, I felt bad being there as we learned they are not properly licensed—but the Amazon does not tend to be a place of licensing and protocol.

Draping an anaconda around my neck—to my own surprise—the snake handler passed me the head while yelling in Spanish. Shocked and afraid that if I didn't take the head they would just simply drop it, I grabbed the neck just behind the head. A mass of tightening musculature, the snake reared its head and opening its mouth hissed at me. Quite a snake, about four meters long and with a reek like death. I was glad to get it off me.

03/22/2009 Iquitos, Peru

We have waited now several weeks in Iquitos to work with the ayahuasca medicine. Though occasionally impatient to get things moving, I know things are unfolding as they should; the synchronicity and magic which has brought us to this point is assurance enough that we are in good hands.

This morning we struggled through an ass-buster of a bike ride through the jungle; now I know why they call it MOUNTAIN biking not jungle biking. Between large sections of mud and sand, the terrain varied far more than one would imagine in this jungle basin. The heat beating down in waves with the passing of the torrential and incessant multitudes of hovering clouds; the sun peaking through, hell's very own beacon in this devil's paradise. We begrudgingly biked to another *mirador*—look-out point—cursing the entire way. Gratefulbear fell off her bicycle just short of the *mirador*, tumbling straight into some monstrosity of a plant with evolved and plentiful splinters like a fine dust burrowing into her skin. Needless to say, she was not pleased.

But I can't complain really, the jungle is just such an incredible unfolding of novelty. The passing of each and every second reveals a wild flux of alien and vegetable geometries, fresh and alive. We were supposed to meet our English companion Nick for swimming this afternoon, but none of us could pull ourselves out of bed. We were so exhausted by the morning's bike ride. We should sleep well tonight.

To be continued in Cenacle | *71* | *December 2009*

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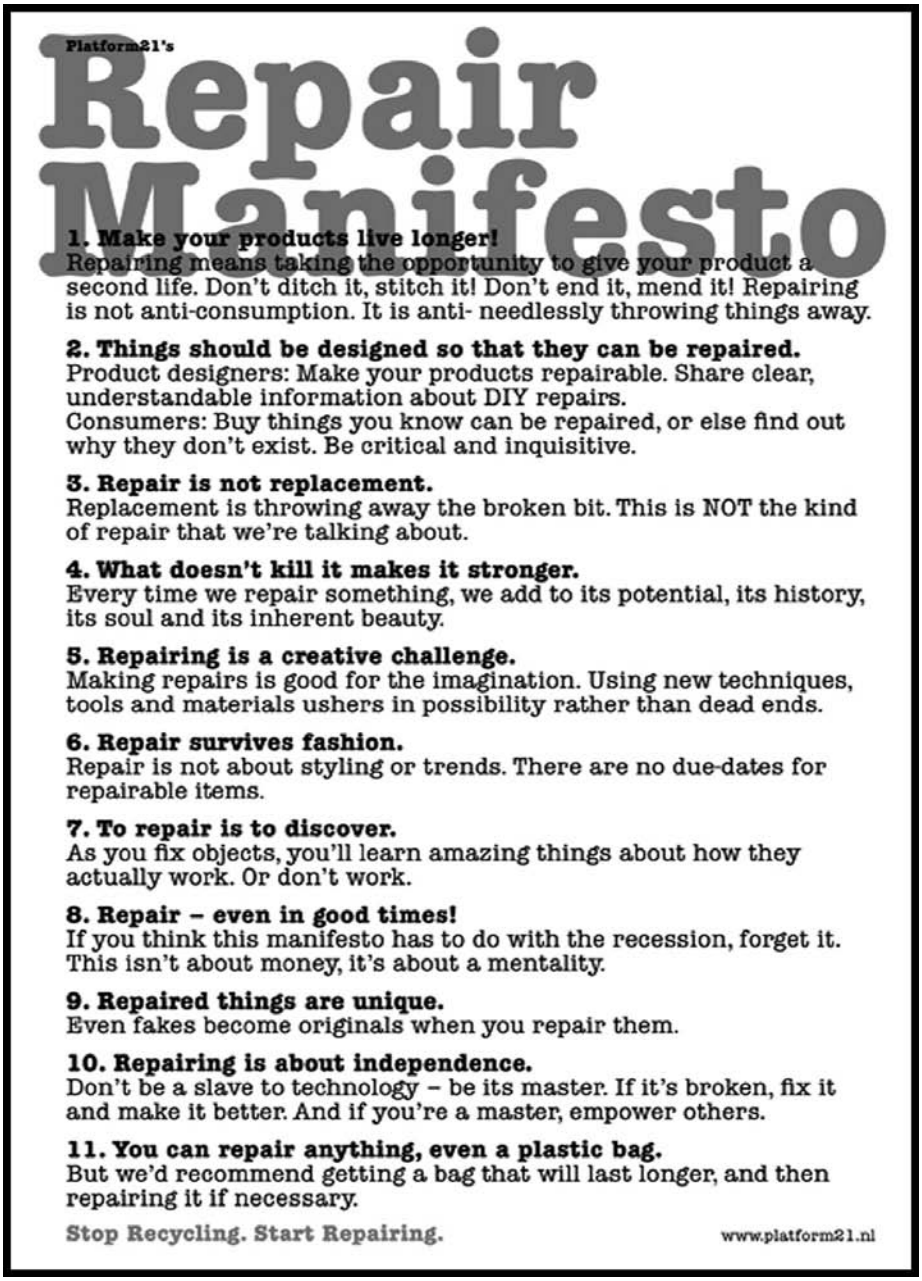


Platform21's

Repair Manifesto

1. Make your products live longer!
Repairing means taking the opportunity to give your product a second life. Don't ditch it, stitch it! Don't end it, mend it! Repairing is not anti-consumption. It is anti- needlessly throwing things away.

2. Things should be designed so that they can be repaired.
Product designers: Make your products repairable. Share clear, understandable information about DIY repairs.
Consumers: Buy things you know can be repaired, or else find out why they don't exist. Be critical and inquisitive.

3. Repair is not replacement.
Replacement is throwing away the broken bit. This is NOT the kind of repair that we're talking about.

4. What doesn't kill it makes it stronger.
Every time we repair something, we add to its potential, its history, its soul and its inherent beauty.

5. Repairing is a creative challenge.
Making repairs is good for the imagination. Using new techniques, tools and materials ushers in possibility rather than dead ends.

6. Repair survives fashion.
Repair is not about styling or trends. There are no due-dates for repairable items.

7. To repair is to discover.
As you fix objects, you'll learn amazing things about how they actually work. Or don't work.

8. Repair – even in good times!
If you think this manifesto has to do with the recession, forget it. This isn't about money, it's about a mentality.

9. Repaired things are unique.
Even fakes become originals when you repair them.

10. Repairing is about independence.
Don't be a slave to technology – be its master. If it's broken, fix it and make it better. And if you're a master, empower others.

11. You can repair anything, even a plastic bag.
But we'd recommend getting a bag that will last longer, and then repairing it if necessary.

Stop Recycling. Start Repairing. www.platform21.nl

Conrad Aiken

Silent Snow, Secret Snow

(classic fiction)

I

Just why it should have happened, or why it should have happened just when it did, he could not, of course, possibly have said; nor perhaps could it even have occurred to him to ask. The thing was above all a secret, something to be preciously concealed from Mother and Father; and to that very fact it owed an enormous part of its deliciousness. It was like a peculiarly beautiful trinket to be carried unmentioned in one's trouser pocket—a rare stamp, an old coin, a few tiny gold links found trodden out of shape on the path in the park, a pebble of carnelian, a sea shell distinguishable from all the others by an unusual spot or stripe—and, as if it were anyone of these, he carried around with him everywhere a warm and persistent and increasingly beautiful sense of possession. Nor was it only a sense of possession—it was also a sense of protection. It was as if, in some delightful way, his secret gave him a fortress, a wall behind which he could retreat into heavenly seclusion. This was almost the first thing he had noticed about it—apart from the oddness of the thing itself—and it was this that now again, for the fiftieth time, occurred to him, as he sat in the little schoolroom. It was the half-hour for geography. Miss Buell was revolving with one finger, slowly, a huge terrestrial globe which had been placed on her desk. The green and yellow continents passed and repassed, questions were asked and answered, and now the little girl in front of him, Deirdre, who had a funny little constellation of freckles on the back of her neck, exactly like the Big Dipper, was standing up and telling Miss Buell that the equator was the line that ran around the middle.

Miss Buell's face, which was old and grayish and kindly, with gray stiff curls beside the cheeks, and eyes that swam very brightly, like little minnows, behind thick glasses, wrinkled itself into a complication of amusements.

"Ah! I see. The earth is wearing a belt, or a sash. Or someone drew a line round it!"

"Oh, no—not that—I mean—"

In the general laughter, he did not share, or only a very little. He was thinking about the Arctic and Antarctic regions, which of course, on the globe, were white. Miss Buell was now telling them about the tropics, the jungles, the steamy heat of equatorial swamps, where the birds and butterflies, and even the snakes, were like living jewels. As he listened to these things, he was already, with a pleasant sense of half effort, putting his secret between himself and the words. Was it really an effort at all? For effort implied something voluntary, and perhaps even something one did not especially want; whereas this was distinctly pleasant, and came almost of its own accord. All he needed to do was to think of that morning, the first one, and then of all the others—

But it was all so absurdly simple! It had amounted to so little. It was nothing, just an idea—and just why it should have become so wonderful, so permanent, was a mystery—a very pleasant one, to be sure, but also, in an amusing way, foolish. However, without ceasing

to listen to Miss Buell, who had now moved up to the north temperate zones, he deliberately invited his memory of the first morning. It was only a moment or two after he had waked up—or perhaps the moment itself. But was there, to be exact, an exact moment? Was one awake all at once? or was it gradual? Anyway, it was after he had stretched a lazy hand up towards the head rail, and yawned, and then relaxed again among his warm covers, all the more grateful on a December morning, that the thing had happened. Suddenly, for no reason, he had thought of the postman, he remembered the postman. Perhaps there was nothing so odd in that. After all, he heard the postman almost every morning in his life—his heavy boots could be heard clumping round the corner at the top of the little cobbled hill street, and then, progressively nearer, progressively louder, the double knock at each door, the crossings and recrossings of the street, till finally the clumsy steps came stumbling across to the very door, and the tremendous knock came which shook the house itself.

(Miss Buell was saying, "Vast wheat-growing areas in North America and Siberia."

Deirdre had for the moment placed her left hand across the back of her neck.)

But on this particular morning, the first morning, as he lay there with his eyes closed, he had for some reason waited for the postman. He wanted to hear him come round the corner. And that was precisely the joke—he never did. He never came. He never had come—round the corner—again. For when at last the steps were heard, they had already, he was quite sure, come a little down the hill, to the first house; and even so, the steps were curiously different—they were softer, they had a new secrecy about them, they were muffled and indistinct; and while the rhythm of them was the same, it now said a new thing—it said peace, it said remoteness, it said cold, it said sleep. And he had understood the situation at once—nothing could have seemed simpler—there had been snow in the night, such as all winter he had been longing for; and it was this which had rendered the postman's first footsteps inaudible, and the later ones faint. Of course! How lovely! And even now it must be snowing—it was going to be a snowy day—the long white ragged lines were drifting and sifting across the street, across the faces of the old houses, whispering and hushing, making little triangles of white in the corners between cobblestones, seething a little when the wind blew them over the ground to a drifted corner; and so it would be all day, getting deeper and deeper and silenter and silenter.

(Miss Buell was saying, "Land of perpetual snow.")

All this time, of course (while he lay in bed), he had kept his eyes closed, listening to the nearer progress of the postman, the muffled footsteps thumping and slipping on the snow-sheathed cobbles; and all the other sounds—the double knocks, a frosty far-off voice or two, a bell ringing thinly and softly as if under a sheet of ice—had the same slightly abstracted quality, as if removed by one degree from actuality— as if everything in the world had been insulated by snow. But when at last, pleased, he opened his eyes, and turned them towards the window, to see for himself this long-desired and now so clearly imagined miracle— what he saw instead was brilliant sunlight on a roof; and when, astonished, he jumped out of bed and stared down into the street, expecting to see the cobbles obliterated by the snow, he saw nothing but the bare bright cobbles themselves.

Queer, the effects this extraordinary surprise had had upon him—kept with him a sense as of snow falling about him, a secret screen of new snow between himself and the world. If he had not dreamed such a thing—and how could he have dreamed it while awake?—how else could one explain it? In any case, the delusion had been so vivid as to affect his entire behavior. He could not now remember whether it was on the first or the second morning—or

was it even the third?—that his mother had drawn attention to some oddness in his manner.

"But, my darling—" she had said at the breakfast table—"what has come over you? You don't seem to be listening . . . ."

And how often that very thing had happened since!

(Miss Buell was now asking if anyone knew the difference between the North Pole and the Magnetic Pole. Deirdre was holding up her flickering brown hand, and he could see the four white dimples that marked the knuckles.)

Perhaps it hadn't been either the second or third morning—or even the fourth or fifth. How could he be sure? How could he be sure just when the delicious progress had become clear? Just when it had really begun? The intervals weren't very precise. . . . All he now knew was that at some point or other—perhaps the second day, perhaps the sixth— he had noticed that the presence of the snow was a little more insistent, the sound of it clearer; and, conversely, the sound of the postman's footsteps more indistinct. Not only could he not hear the steps come round the corner, he could not even hear them at the first house. It was below the first house that he heard them; and then, a few days later, it was below the second house that he heard them; and a few days later again, below the third. Gradually, gradually, the snow was becoming heavier, the sound of its seething louder, the cobblestones more and more muffled. When he found, each morning, on going to the window, after the ritual of listening, that the roofs and cobbles were as bare as ever, it made no difference. This was, after all, only what he had expected. It was even what pleased him, what rewarded him: the thing was his own, belonged to no one else. No one else knew about it, not even his mother and father. There, outside, were the bare cobbles; and here, inside, was the snow. Snow growing heavier each day, muffling the world, hiding the ugly, and deadening increasingly—above all—the steps of the postman.

"But, my darling—" she had said at the luncheon table—"what has come over you? You don't seem to listen when people speak to you. That's the third time I've asked you to pass your plate . . . ."

How was one to explain this to Mother? or to Father? There was, of course, nothing to be done about it: nothing. All one could do was to laugh embarrassedly, pretend to be a little ashamed, apologize, and take a sudden and somewhat disingenuous interest in what was being done or said. The cat had stayed out all night. He had a curious swelling on his left cheek—perhaps somebody had kicked him, or a stone had struck him. Mrs. Kempton was or was not coming to tea. The house was going to be house cleaned, or "turned out," on Wednesday instead of Friday. A new lamp was provided for his evening work— perhaps it was eyestrain which accounted for this new and so peculiar vagueness of his—Mother was looking at him with amusement as she said this, but with something else as well. A new lamp? A new lamp. Yes Mother, No Mother, Yes Mother. School is going very well. The geometry is very easy. The history is very dull. The geography is very interesting— particularly when it takes one to the North Pole. Why the North Pole? Oh, well, it would be fun to be an explorer. Another Peary or Scott or Shackleton. And then abruptly he found his interest in the talk at an end, stared at the pudding on his plate, listened, waited, and began once more—ah how heavenly, too, the first beginnings—to hear or feel— for could he actually hear it?—the silent snow, the secret snow.

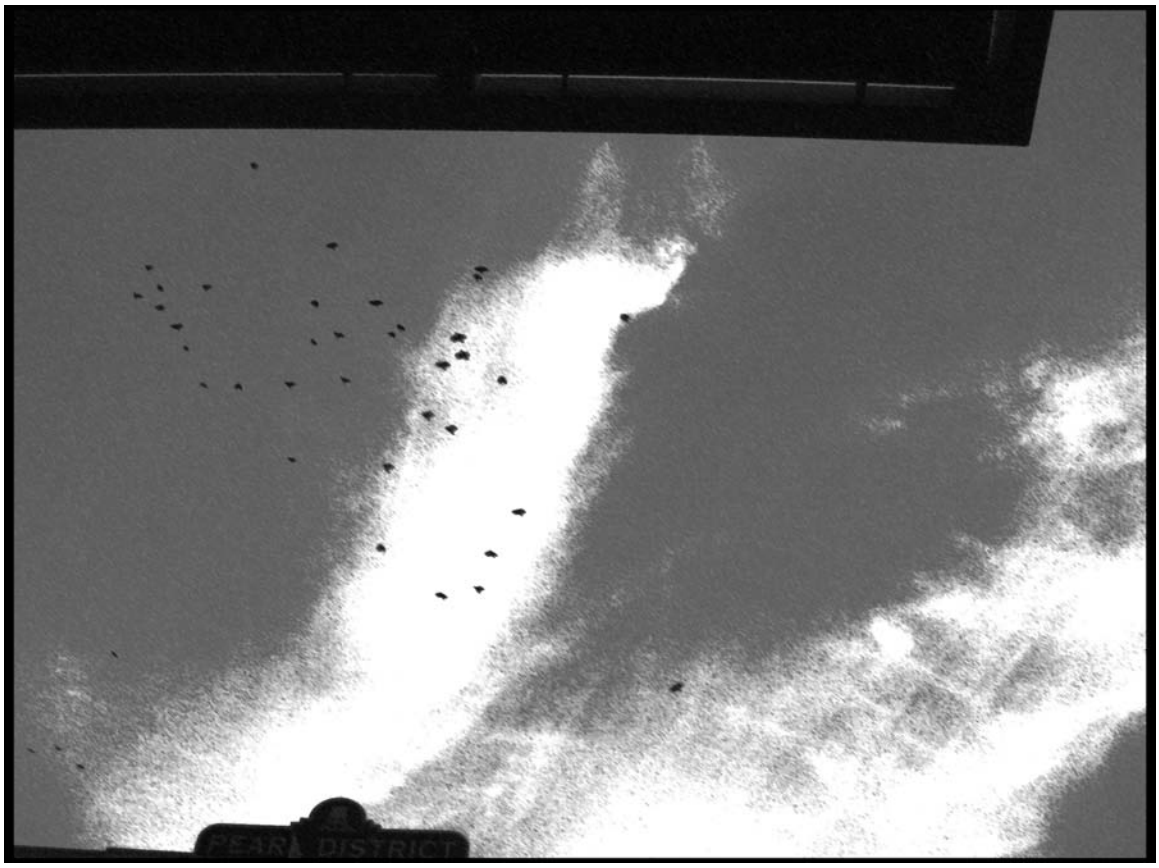
(Miss Buell was telling them about the search for the Northwest Passage, about Hendrik Hudson, the Half Moon.)

This had been, indeed, the only distressing feature of the new experience: the fact that

it so increasingly had brought him into a kind of mute misunderstanding, or even conflict, with his father and mother. It was as if he were trying to lead a double life. On the one hand he had to be Paul Hasleman, and keep up the appearance of being that person— dress, wash, and answer intelligently when spoken to; on the other, he had to explore this new world which had been opened to him. Nor could there be the slightest doubt—not the slightest—that the new world was the profounder and more wonderful of the two. It was irresistible. It was miraculous. Its beauty was simply beyond anything— beyond speech as beyond thought—utterly incommunicable. But how then, between the two worlds, of which he was thus constantly aware, was he to keep a balance? One must get up, one must go to breakfast, one must talk with Mother, go to school, do one's lessons—and, in all this, try not to appear too much of a fool. But if all the while one was also trying to extract the full deliciousness of another and quite separate existence, one which could not easily (if at all) be spoken of—how was one to manage? How was one to explain? Would it be absurd? Would it merely mean that he would get into some obscure kind of trouble?

These thoughts came and went, came and went, as softly and secretly as the snow; they were not precisely a disturbance, perhaps they were even a pleasure; he liked to have them; their presence was something almost palpable, something he could stroke with his hand, without closing his eyes, and without ceasing to see Miss Buell and the schoolroom and the globe and the freckles on Deirdre's neck; nevertheless he did in a sense cease to see, or to see the obvious external world, and substituted for this vision the vision of snow, the sound of snow, and the slow, almost soundless, approach of the postman. Yesterday, it had been only at the sixth house that the postman had become audible; the snow was much deeper now, it was falling more swiftly and heavily, the sound of its seething was more distinct, more soothing, more persistent. And this morning, it had been—as nearly as he could figure—just above the seventh house—perhaps only a step or two above: at most, he had heard two or three footsteps before the knock had sounded . . . . And with each such narrowing of the sphere, each nearer approach of the limit at which the postman was first audible, it was odd how sharply was increased the amount of illusion which had to be carried into the ordinary business of daily life. Each day, it was harder to get out of bed, to go to the window, to look out at the—as always—perfectly empty and snowless street. Each day it was more difficult to go through the perfunctory motions of greeting Mother and Father at breakfast, to reply to their questions, to put his books together and go to school. And at school, how extraordinarily hard to conduct with success simultaneously the public life and the life that was secret. There were times when he longed—positively ached—to tell everyone about it—to burst out with it—only to be checked almost at once by a far-off feeling as of some faint absurdity which was inherent in it—but was it absurd?—and more importantly by a sense of mysterious power in his very secrecy. Yes: it must be kept secret. That, more and more, became clear. At whatever cost to himself, whatever pain to others—

(Miss Buell looked straight at him, smiling, and said, "Perhaps we'll ask Paul. I'm sure Paul will come out of his daydream long enough to be able to tell us. Won't you, Paul." He rose slowly from his chair, resting one hand on the brightly varnished desk, and deliberately stared through the snow towards the blackboard. It was an effort, but it was amusing to make it. "Yes," he said slowly, "it was what we now call the Hudson River. This he thought to be the Northwest Passage. He was disappointed." He sat down again, and as he did so Deirdre half turned in her chair and gave him a shy smile, of approval and admiration.)



At whatever pain to others.

This part of it was very puzzling, very puzzling. Mother was very nice, and so was Father. Yes, that was all true enough. He wanted to be nice to them, to tell them everything—and yet, was it really wrong of him to want to have a secret place of his own?

At bedtime, the night before, Mother had said, "If this goes on, my lad, we'll have to see a doctor, we will! We can't have our boy—" But what was it she had said? "Live in another world"? "Live so far away"? The word "far" had been in it, he was sure, and then Mother had taken up a magazine again and laughed a little, but with an expression which wasn't mirthful. He had felt sorry for her . . . .

The bell rang for dismissal. The sound came to him through long curved parallels of falling snow. He saw Deirdre rise, and had himself risen almost as soon—but not quite as soon—as she.

II

On the walk homeward, which was timeless, it pleased him to see through the accompaniment, or counterpoint, of snow, the items of mere externality on his way. There were many kinds of bricks in the sidewalks, and laid in many kinds of pattern. The garden walls too were various, some of wooden palings, some of plaster, some of stone. Twigs of bushes leaned over the walls; the little hard green winter buds of lilac, on gray stems, sheathed and fat; other branches very thin and fine and black and desiccated. Dirty sparrows huddled in the bushes, as dull in color as dead fruit left in leafless trees. A single starling creaked on a weather vane. In the gutter, beside a drain, was a scrap of torn and dirty newspaper, caught in a little delta of filth: the word ECZEMA appeared in large capitals, and below it was a letter from Mrs. Amelia D. Cravath, 2100 Pine Street, Fort Worth, Texas, to the effect that after being a sufferer for years she had been cured by Caley's Ointment. In the little delta, beside the fan-shaped and deeply runneled continent of brown mud, were lost twigs, descended from their parent trees, dead matches, a rusty horse-chestnut burr, a small concentration of sparkling gravel on the lip of the sewer, a fragment of eggshell, a streak of yellow sawdust which had been wet and was now dry and congealed, a brown pebble, and a broken feather. Further on was a cement sidewalk, ruled into geometrical parallelograms, with a brass inlay at one end commemorating the contractors who had laid it, and, halfway across, an irregular and random series of dog tracks, immortalized in synthetic stone. He knew these well, and always stepped on them; to cover the little hollows with his own foot had always been a queer pleasure; today he did it once more, but perfunctorily and detachedly, all the while thinking of something else. That was a dog, a long time ago, who had made a mistake and walked on the cement while it was still wet. He had probably wagged his tail, but that hadn't been recorded. Now, Paul Hasleman, aged twelve, on his way home from school, crossed the same river, which in the meantime had frozen into rock. Homeward through the snow, the snow falling in bright sunshine. Homeward?

Then came the gateway with the two posts surmounted by egg-shaped stones which had been cunningly balanced on their ends, as if by Columbus, and mortared in the very act of balance: a source of perpetual wonder. On the brick wall just beyond, the letter H had been stenciled, presumably for some purpose. H? H.

The green hydrant, with a little green-painted chain attached to the brass screw cap.

The elm tree, with the great gray wound in the bark, kidney-shaped, into which he always put his hand—to feel the cold but living wood. The injury, he had been sure, was due to the knawings of a tethered horse. But now it deserved only a passing palm, a merely tolerant eye. There were more important things. Miracles. Beyond the thoughts of trees, mere elms. Beyond the thoughts of sidewalks, mere stone, mere brick, mere cement. Beyond the thoughts even of his own shoes, which trod these sidewalks obediently, bearing a burden—far above—of elaborate mystery. He watched them. They were not very well polished; he had neglected them, for a very good reason: they were one of the many parts of the increasing difficulty of the daily return to daily life, the morning struggle. To get up, having at last opened one's eyes, to go to the window, and discover no snow, to wash, to dress, to descend the curving stairs to breakfast—

At whatever pain to others, nevertheless, one must persevere in severance, since the incommunicability of the experience demanded it. It was desirable of course to be kind to Mother and Father, especially as they seemed to be worried, but it was also desirable to be resolute. If they should decide—as appeared likely—to consult the doctor, Doctor Howells, and have Paul inspected, his heart listened to through a kind of dictaphone, his lungs, his stomach—well, that was all right. He would go through with it. He would give them answer for question, too— perhaps such answers as they hadn't expected? No. That would never do. For the secret world must, at all costs, be persevered.

The birdhouse in the apple tree was empty—it was the wrong time of year for wrens. The little round black door had lost its pleasure. The wrens were enjoying other houses, other nests, remoter trees. But this too was a notion which he only vaguely and grazingly entertained— as if, for the moment, he merely touched an edge of it; there was something further on, which was already assuming a sharper importance; something which already teased at the corners of his eyes, teasing also at the corner of his mind. It was funny to think that he so wanted this, so awaited it—and yet found himself enjoying this momentary dalliance with the birdhouse, as if for a quite deliberate postponement and enhancement of the approaching pleasure. He was aware of his delay, of his smiling and detached and now almost uncomprehending gaze at the little birdhouse; he knew what he was going to look at next: it was his own little cobbled hill street, his own house, the little river at the bottom of the hill, the grocer's shop with the cardboard man in the window— and now, thinking all this, he turned his head, still smiling, and looking quickly right and left through the snow-laden sunlight.

And the mist of snow, as he had foreseen, was still on it—a ghost of snow falling in the bright sunlight, softly and steadily floating and turning and pausing, soundlessly meeting the snow that covered, as with a transparent mirage, the bare bright cobbles. He loved it—he stood still and loved it. Its beauty was paralyzing—beyond all words, all experience, all dream. No fairy story he had ever read could be compared with it—none had ever given him this extraordinary combination of ethereal loveliness with a something else, unnamable, which was just faintly and deliciously terrifying. What was this thing? As he thought of it, he looked upward toward his own bedroom window, which was open—and it was as if he looked straight into the room and saw himself lying half awake in his bed. There he was—at this very instant he was still perhaps actually there—more truly there than standing here at the edge of the cobbled hill street, with one hand lifted to shade his eyes against the snow-sun. Had he indeed ever left his room, in all this time? since that very first morning? Was the whole progress still being enacted there, was it still the same morning, and himself not yet wholly awake? And even

now, had the postman not yet come round the corner? . . .

This idea amused him, and automatically, as he thought of it, he turned his head and looked toward the top of the hill. There was, of course, nothing there—nothing and no one. The street was empty and quiet. And all the more because of its emptiness it occurred to him to count the houses—a thing which, oddly enough, he hadn't before thought of doing. Of course, he had known there weren't many—many, that is, on his own side of the street, which were the ones that figured in the postman's progress—but nevertheless it came to him as something of a shock to find that there were precisely six, above his own house— his own house was the seventh.

Six!

Astonished, he looked at his own house—looked at the door, on which was the number thirteen—and then realized that the whole thing was exactly and logically and absurdly what he ought to have known. Just the same, the realization gave him abruptly, and even a little frighteningly, a sense of hurry. He was being hurried—he was being rushed. For—he knit his brows—he couldn't be mistaken—it was just above the seventh house, his own house, that the postman had first been audible this very morning. But in that case—in that case—did it mean that tomorrow he would hear nothing? The knock he had heard must have been the knock of their own door. Did it mean—and this was an idea which gave him a really extraordinary feeling of surprise—that he would never hear the postman again?—that tomorrow morning the postman would already have passed the house, in a snow by then so deep as to render his footsteps completely inaudible? That he would have made his approach down the snow-filled street so soundlessly, so secretly, that he, Paul Hasleman, there lying in bed, would not have waked in time, or, waking, would have heard nothing?

But how could that be? Unless the knocker should be muffled in the snow—frozen tight, perhaps? . . . But in that case—

A vague feeling of disappointment came over him; a vague sadness, as if he felt himself deprived of something which he had long looked forward to, something much prized. After all this, all this beautiful progress, the slow delicious advance of the postman through the silent and secret snow, the knock creeping closer each day, and the footsteps nearer, the audible compass of the world thus daily narrowed, narrowed, narrowed, as the snow soothingly and beautifully encroached and deepened, after all this, was he to be defrauded of the one thing he had so wanted—to be able to count, as it were, the last two or three solemn footsteps, as they finally approached his own door? Was it all going to happen, at the end, so suddenly? or indeed, had it already happened? with no slow and subtle gradations of menace, in which he could luxuriate?

He gazed upward again, toward his own window which flashed in the sun: and this time almost with a feeling that it would be better if he were still in bed, in that room; for in that case this must still be the first morning, and there would be six more mornings to come—or, for that matter, seven or eight or nine—how could he be sure?—or even more.

III

After supper, the inquisition began. He stood before the doctor, under the lamp, and submitted silently to the usual thumpings and tappings.

"Now will you please say 'Ah?'"

"Ah!"

"Now again please, if you don't mind."

"Ah."

"Say it slowly, and hold it if you can—"

"Ah-h-h-h-h-h—"

"Good."

How silly all this was. As if it had anything to do with his throat! Or his heart or lungs!

Relaxing his mouth, of which the corners, after all this absurd stretching, felt uncomfortable, he avoided the doctor's eyes, and stared towards the fireplace, past his mother's feet (in gray slippers) which projected from the green chair, and his father's feet (in brown slippers) which stood neatly side by side on the hearth rug.

"Hm. There is certainly nothing wrong there . . ."

He felt the doctor's eyes fixed upon him, and, as if merely to be polite, returned the look, but with a feeling of justifiable evasiveness.

"Now, young man, tell me—do you feel all right?"

"Yes, sir, quite all right."

"No headaches? no dizziness?"

"No, I don't think so."

"Let me see. Let's get a book, if you don't mind—yes, thank you, that will do splendidly—and now, Paul, if you'll just read it, holding it as you would normally hold it—"

He took the book and read:

"And another praise have I to tell for this the city our mother, the gift of a great god, a glory of the land most high; the might of horses, the might of young horses, the might of the sea. . . . For thou, son of Cronus, our lord Poseidon, hast throned herein this pride, since in these roads first thou didst show forth the curb that cures the rage of steeds. And the shapely oar, apt to men's hands, hath a wondrous speed on the brine, following the hundred-footed Nereids. . . . O land that art praised above all lands, now is it for thee to make those bright praises seen in deeds."

He stopped, tentatively, and lowered the heavy book.

"No—as I thought—there is certainly no superficial sign of eyestrain."

Silence thronged the room, and he was aware of the focused scrutiny of the three people who confronted him . . . .

"He could have his eyes examined—but I believe it is something else."

"What could it be?" This was his father's voice.

"It's only this curious absent-minded—" This was his mother's voice.

In the presence of the doctor, they both seemed irritatingly apologetic.

"I believe it is something else. Now, Paul—I would like very much to ask you a question or two. You will answer them, won't you— you know I'm an old, old friend of yours, eh? That's right! . . . ."

His back was thumped twice by the doctor's fat fist—then the doctor was grinning at him with false amiability, while with one fingernail he was scratching the top button of his waistcoat. Beyond the doctor's shoulder was the fire, the fingers of flame making light prestidigitation against the sooty fireback, the soft sound of their random flutter the only sound.

"I would like to know—is there anything that worries you?"

The doctor was again smiling, his eyelids low against the little black pupils, in each of which was a tiny white bead of light. Why answer him? why answer him at all. "At whatever pain to others"—but it was all a nuisance, this necessity for resistance, this necessity for attention: it was if one had been stood up on a brilliantly lighted stage, under a great round blaze of spotlight; as if one were merely a trained seal, or a performing dog, or a fish, dipped out of an aquarium and held up by the tail. It would serve them right if he were merely to bark or growl. And meanwhile, to miss these last few precious hours, these hours of which every minute was more beautiful than the last, more menacing—? He still looked, as if from a great distance, at the beads of light in the doctor's eyes, at the fixed false smile, and then, beyond, once more at his mother's slippers, the soft flutter of the fire. Even here, even amongst these hostile presences, and in this arranged light, he could see the snow, he could hear it—it was in the corners of the room, where the shadow was deepest, under the sofa, behind the half-opened door which led to the dining room. It was gentler here, softer, its seethe the quietest of whispers, as if, in deference to a drawing room, it had quite deliberately put on its "manners"; it kept itself out of sight, obliterated itself, but distinctly with an air of saying, "Ah, but just wait! Wait till we are alone together! Then I will begin to tell you something new! Something white! something cold! something sleepy! something of cease, and peace, and the long bright curve of space! Tell them to go away. Banish them. Refuse to speak. Leave them, go upstairs to your room, turn out the light and get into bed—I will go with you, I will be waiting for you, I will tell you a better story than Little Kay of the Skates, or The Snow Ghost—I will surround your bed, I will close the windows, pile a deep drift against the door, so that none will ever again be able to enter. Speak to them? . . ." It seemed as if the little hissing voice came from a slow white spiral of falling flakes in the corner by the front window—but he could not be sure. He felt himself smiling, then, and said to the doctor, but without looking at him, looking beyond him still—

"Oh, no, I think not—"

"But are you sure, my boy?"

His father's voice came softly and coldly then—the familiar voice of silken warning . . . .

"You needn't answer at once, Paul—remember we're trying to help you—think it over and be quite sure, won't you?"

He felt himself smiling again, at the notion of being quite sure. What a joke! As if he weren't so sure that reassurance was no longer necessary, and all this cross-examination a ridiculous farce, a grotesque parody! What could they know about it? These gross intelligences, these humdrum minds so bound to the usual, the ordinary? Impossible to tell them about it! Why, even now, even now, with the proof so abundant, so formidable, so imminent, so appallingly present here in this very room, could they believe it?—could even his mother believe it? No—it was only too plain that if anything were said about it, the merest hint given, they would be incredulous—they would laugh—they would say, "Absurd!"—think things about him which weren't true . . . .

"Why no, I'm not worried—why should I be?"

He looked then straight at the doctor's low-lidded eyes, looked from one of them to the other, from one bead of light to the other, and gave a little laugh.

The doctor seemed to be disconcerted by this. He drew back in his chair, resting a fat

white hand on either knee. The smile faded slowly from his face.

"Well, Paul!" he said, and paused gravely, "I'm afraid you don't take this quite seriously enough. I think you perhaps don't quite realize— don't quite realize—" He took a deep quick breath, and turned as if helpless, at a loss for words, to the others. But Mother and Father were both silent—no help was forthcoming.

"You must surely know, be aware, that you have not been quite yourself of late? don't you know that? . . ."

It was amusing to watch the doctor's renewed attempt at a smile, a queer disorganized look, as of confidential embarrassment.

"I feel all right, sir," he said, and again gave the little laugh.

"And we're trying to help you." The doctor's tone sharpened.

"Yes, sir, I know. But why? I'm all right. I'm just thinking, that's all."

His mother made a quick movement forward, resting a hand on the back of the doctor's chair.

"Thinking?" she said. "But my dear, about what?"

This was a direct challenge—and would have to be directly met. But before he met it, he looked again into the corner by the door, as if for reassurance. He smiled again at what he saw, at what he heard. The little spiral was still there, still softly whirling, like the ghost of a white kitten chasing the ghost of a white tail, and making as it did so the faintest of whispers. It was all right! If only he could remain firm, everything was going to be all right.

"Oh, about anything, about nothing—you know the way you do!"

"You mean—daydreaming?"

"Oh, no—thinking!"

"But thinking about what?"

"Anything."

He laughed a third time—but this time, happening to glance upward towards his mother's face, he was appalled at the effect his laughter seemed to have upon her. Her mouth had opened in an expression of horror . . . . This was too bad! Unfortunate! He had known it would cause pain, of course—but he hadn't expected it to be quite so bad as this. Perhaps—perhaps if he just gave them a tiny gleaming hint—?

"About the snow," he said.

"What on earth!" This was his father's voice. The brown slippers came a step nearer on the hearth-rug.

"But, my dear, what do you mean!" This was his mother's voice.

The doctor merely stared.

"Just snow, that's all. I like to think about it."

"Tell us about it, my boy."

"But that's all it is. There's nothing to tell. You know what snow is?"

This he said almost angrily, for he felt that they were trying to corner him. He turned sideways so as no longer to face the doctor, and the better to see the inch of blackness between the window sill and the lowered curtains—the cold inch of beckoning and delicious night. At once he felt better, more assured.

"Mother—can I go to bed, now, please? I've got a headache."

"But I thought you said—"

"It's just come. It's all these questions—! Can I, Mother?"

"You can go as soon as the doctor has finished."

"Don't you think this thing ought to be gone into thoroughly, and now?" This was Father's voice. The brown slippers again came a step nearer, the voice was the well-known "punishment" voice, resonant and cruel.

"Oh, what's the use, Norman—"

Quite suddenly, everyone was silent. And without precisely facing them, nevertheless he was aware that all three of them were watching him with an extraordinary intensity—staring hard at him—as if he had done something monstrous, or was himself some kind of monster. He could hear the soft irregular flutter of the flames; the cluck-click-cluckclick of the clock; far and faint, two sudden spurts of laughter from the kitchen, as quickly cut off as begun; a murmur of water in the pipes; and then, the silence seemed to deepen, to spread out, to become world-long and world-wide, to become timeless and shapeless, and to center inevitably and rightly, with a slow and sleepy but enormous concentration of all power, on the beginning of a new sound. What this new sound was going to be, he knew perfectly well. It might begin with a hiss, but it would end with a roar—there was no time to lose—he must escape. It mustn't happen here—

Without another word, he turned and ran up the stairs.

IV

Not a moment too soon. The darkness was coming in long white waves. A prolonged sibilance filled the night—a great seamless seethe of wild influence went abruptly across it—a cold low humming shook the windows. He shut the door and flung off his clothes in the dark. The bare black floor was like a little raft tossed in waves of snow, almost overwhelmed, washed under whitely, up again, smothered in curled billows of feather. The snow was laughing: it spoke from all sides at once: it pressed closer to him as he ran and jumped exulting into his bed.

"Listen to us!" it said. "Listen! We have come to tell you the story we told you about. You remember? Lie down. Shut your eyes, now—you will no longer see much—in this white darkness who could see, or want to see? We will take the place of everything . . . . Listen—"

A beautiful varying dance of snow began at the front of the room, came forward and then retreated, flattened out toward the floor, then rose fountainlike to the ceiling, swayed, recruited itself from a new stream of flakes which poured laughing in through the humming window, advanced again, lifted long white arms. It said peace, it said remoteness, it said cold—it said—

But then a gash of horrible light fell brutally across the room from the opening door—the snow drew back hissing—something alien had come into the room—something hostile. This thing rushed at him, clutched at him, shook him—and he was not merely horrified, he was filled with such a loathing as he had never known. What was this? this cruel disturbance? this act of anger and hate? It was as if he had to reach up a hand toward another world for any understanding of it—an effort of which he was only barely capable. But of that other world he still remembered just enough to know the exorcising words. They tore themselves from his other life suddenly—

"Mother! Mother! Go away! I hate you!"

And with that effort, everything was solved, everything became all right: the seamless

hiss advanced once more, the long white wavering lines rose and fell like enormous whispering sea waves, the whisper becoming louder, the laughter more numerous.

"Listen!" it said. "We'll tell you the last, the most beautiful and secret story—shut your eyes—it is a very small story—a story that gets smaller and smaller—it comes inward instead of opening like a flower— it is a flower becoming a seed—a little cold seed—do you hear? we are leaning closer to you—"

The hiss was now becoming a roar—the whole world was a vast moving screen of snow—but even now it said peace, it said remoteness, it said cold, it said sleep.

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Victor Vanek

Raymond Soulard, Jr.

Notes from the Northwest

The following continues the series originally called Notes from New England*, begun in issue 24-25 (Winter 1998), and resumed after a long absence in issue 59 (October 2006). It is intended as a gathering-place for observations of various lengths upon the world around me. It will be culled, like much of my writing, from my notebooks, and perhaps these thoughts will be expanded upon sometimes as well.*

"That nothing's to wait for,
everything's to be done, we are the tinder
that waits gathering, & the ignition."

This feature of the *Cenacle* is one I've troubled over sometimes—its form & content unpredictable from issue to issue—not a bad thing in itself—& yet—troubled. I'm not sure how much of the Pacific Northwest figures in these notes, other than that I live here, this region is my local, current reality.

Unlike *The Cenacle's* years in New England (1995-2002), however, I do not feel a blood-deep connection to this region. I was drawn here for a tangle of reasons—romantic love, curiosity, an affinity for the regional origins of the '60s counterculture, of which my writing, my projects, & I are all apart.

I wanted to be closer to the source—to Kesey's Acid Tests of old, to the Burning Man Arts Fest. I've accomplished this, to a degree. But even here the counterculture, while present, is a small part of the whole.

I lived in Seattle from 2004-2007, & Portland since then. Is San Francisco next? Will I find it there? Or will I return to Boston, with KD & our possessions, & figure what remains, what gone, what new?

In other words, I don't intend to stay in Portland but don't know where next, or why. My job is a contract in downtown Portland, runs out in December. I don't know about 2010, fret it often. The pull toward a new place; the pull from a beloved one. The worry of cost of living either way. What next, what possible.

Portland is a small, pretty, green city. I don't think it wishes to be otherwise. For me it is not sufficient; I want greater cultural vastness, even more than I can avail myself on any regular basis. It's a deep demand; I feel the lack of arthouse cinemas here, major museums, even late-night coffeehouses. Portland has some of these things; not enough for me; enough for its more permanent residents.

Would San Francisco be a greater treasure or a larger city with no roots other than my sentiments for how it was in 1967?

And Boston? Or, really, New England? It's a continent away. Its weather can be harsh. Is harsh, nearly every summer & winter. Spring & fall are usually glorious & too brief. I have dear ones there, & more heart's roots than I'll ever have out here.

NO TRE

I don't know. These "Notes," this time, are about how I do not know. For I recognize it's been my restlessness that has moved me from Hartford to Boston to Seattle to Portland to . . . ? Millions live in each place & stay.

I have not. I land, rest, work, & eventually move along.

I bring my pens & notebooks, & KD, & our possessions. Home in these more than a place. So far.

What I want to tell myself, & heed, is to cherish now no matter where or what it is. Art, health, love, safety. *Cherish them!*

I talked to my friend the counselor today, she is friend & counselor both, & she asked me: "What do you fear?" & I told her settling for another contract job, shackled to its pay & its limited duration. She challenged me to make a big leap—I said it was to find full-time, telecommuting work—it makes sense—a technical writer/editor needs three things: a laptop computer, a network connection, & a paid task. Simple. Easy. Once I focused on this in our phone conversation, the path seemed clear. I'd gotten such a job two years ago—it's how we were able to move from Seattle down to Portland. Same path leads from Portland elsewhere . . . wherever. Funny thing is that this friend helped me focus two years ago & that focus, & luck, produced success.

More than that, as much as that is, is the collaboration I'd like to have again, the professional satisfaction of good collaboration. I divide my mind into work I do myself—mainly my writing—work that is my own—& collaborative work with those I respect & care for—Scriptor Press's many projects (journal, books, radio, website).

What point in including these comments in these "Notes"? This: I believe a person who aspires to maturity, & a society that aspires to produce & be led by mature persons, is one that encourages both individual development & deep collaboration.

What I see in Western society is competition, feud, war. Ever facet is ridden & poisoned with these. It is encouraged from childhood forth, intensified in adolescence to a point past rationality, & codified in adulthood—so embedded in the ways of things that it seems common—as needed—as air, water, hunger, weather, passage of time, change in flesh.

I don't dismiss competition as an aspect of human psyche. It seems embedded in the very chemicals of the brain—an aspect of racial survival & perpetuity. I believe, however, that what surpasses biology, the pleasure of games, is a poison generated by consciousness. Why? A conscious being asks the fundamental question: Why? The answers never completely satisfy. Why? Because faith nor science nor individual experience covers the whole of the question. Why? Because. But why? Because. But—because. One falls asleep, dissatisfied, dreams fragments of what could be answers. Or one fucks a loved one, or a stranger, & in that moment of orgasm there is a chasm in the murk, one cries toward it, it fades. Or one takes a hit of LSD & the doors open wide, for awhile they disappear completely. Then they return, not as solid, but they do return. Maybe other doors, maybe new rooms, maybe deeper in or further out, but—nonetheless—doors, rooms.

There are moments when collaboration accomplishes something, produces a child, a music, a great document espousing the rights of liberty & responsibility. A thousand dance all night in the woods, in a clearing beneath full moonlight. This versus a thousand men & their machines marched off to war, or a preacher calling his tome singular truth & dismissing the worth of all who will not embrace & conform.

So I look for work, another scrabbling man for his lucky chance, & a home that feels

like home in hours high, sad, & common. But more really, a sense of fullness which nears & eludes most, if not all, of us all our lives. A sense that "Why?" is answered, if not in sentences, then by our actions, way of life, that what we do embodies what we believe rather than vice-versa.

The gestures toward this are uncertain, clumsy, rife with some or more dead ends. But when these "Notes" tell of such efforts, however they do from one instance to the next, then I can believe they are accomplishing something worth writing, & publishing, & reading.

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Victor Vanek

Notes on Contributors

AbandonView lives in the American Rust Belt. He contributed the amazing color cover to *Cenacle* | 68 | April 2009, and now readers can see that his vision is equally enthralling in black and white. He and I discuss the stresses and strains of making art in this world sometimes; I think we both agree they are worth it.

Conrad Aiken was born in 1889 in Savannah, Georgia, grew up in Massachusetts, lived in England, and died in Savannah in 1973. During his lifetime he was acclaimed as a poet and prose writer. His story re-printed in this issue is also a volume in the 2009 Burning Man Books series. It was a story I read many years ago, & its haunting mien never left me.

Ric Amante lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. He is currently working on a new book of poetry, for publication later in 2009, and I am sure that everyone with a chance to read it will feel themselves to be very lucky indeed.

Jim Burke III lives in Hartford, Connecticut. His prose last appeared in *Cenacle* | 69 | June 2009. Jim and I have not seen each other in person in some time, but I carry his friendship and his music in my heart always.

Catfishrivers lives in Oak Ridge, New Jersey. His beguiling art is new to the pages of *The Cenacle*, but he has hosted the equally strange and dandy "River's Edge" radio program on SpiritPlants Radio since June 2009. More information on this show can be found at http://spfradio.yage.net as well as http://www.catfishrivers.com.

Ralph H. Emerson lives in South Glastonbury, Connecticut. His prose last appeared in *Cenacle* | 69 | June 2009. Each essay he contributes brings the day a bit closer when all these are gathered into a Scriptor Press volume.

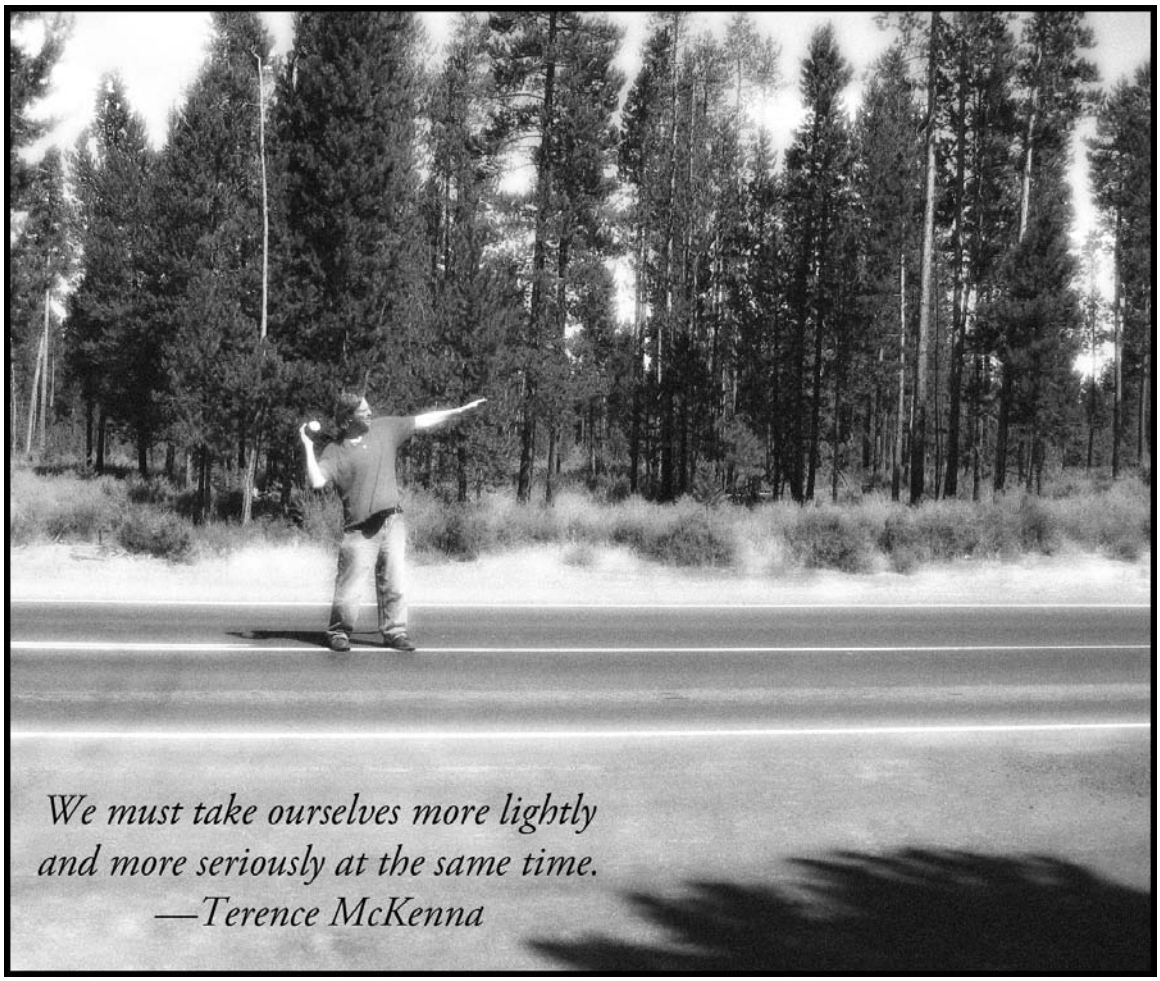
Christopher Patrick Gose lives in Bodega Bay, California. His prose last appeared in *Cenacle* | 69 | June 2009. It has been this journal's privilege to be publishing his travel journal in recent issues, and to be able to publish its conclusion in the December 2009 issue.

Judih Haggai lives at Kibbutz Nir Oz in Israel. Her poetry regularly appears in *The Cenacle*, keeping the journal twisted in light & heavy thoughts it would dearly lack otherwise. I cherish her work, and am glad she finds her way to keep making it. More of her art and writing can be found at http://tribes.tribe.net/poetryjams.

Kassandra Soulard lives in Portland, Oregon. By her hand & encouragement has this journal vastly improved its layout and design in recent issues. Working with her as collaborator over the years has made this a more beautiful, and more happily made, publication.

Raymond Soulard, Jr. lives in Portland, Oregon. When not obsessing over this journal, or SpiritPlants Radio, or the pen-inked raging rags in my notebooks, I am not much of anything interesting to myself or others. Here's to Art, that fleshes my soul's bones, and makes me something worth the air & space I occupy. Heh.

Victor Vanek lives in The Dalles, Oregon. His excellent photography last appeared in *Cenacle* | 67 | December 2008. To him I say: keep taking pictures, keep smiling honestly, keep getting up every day and walking your own path, brother, no matter what.


We must take ourselves more lightly
and more seriously at the same time.
—Terence McKenna